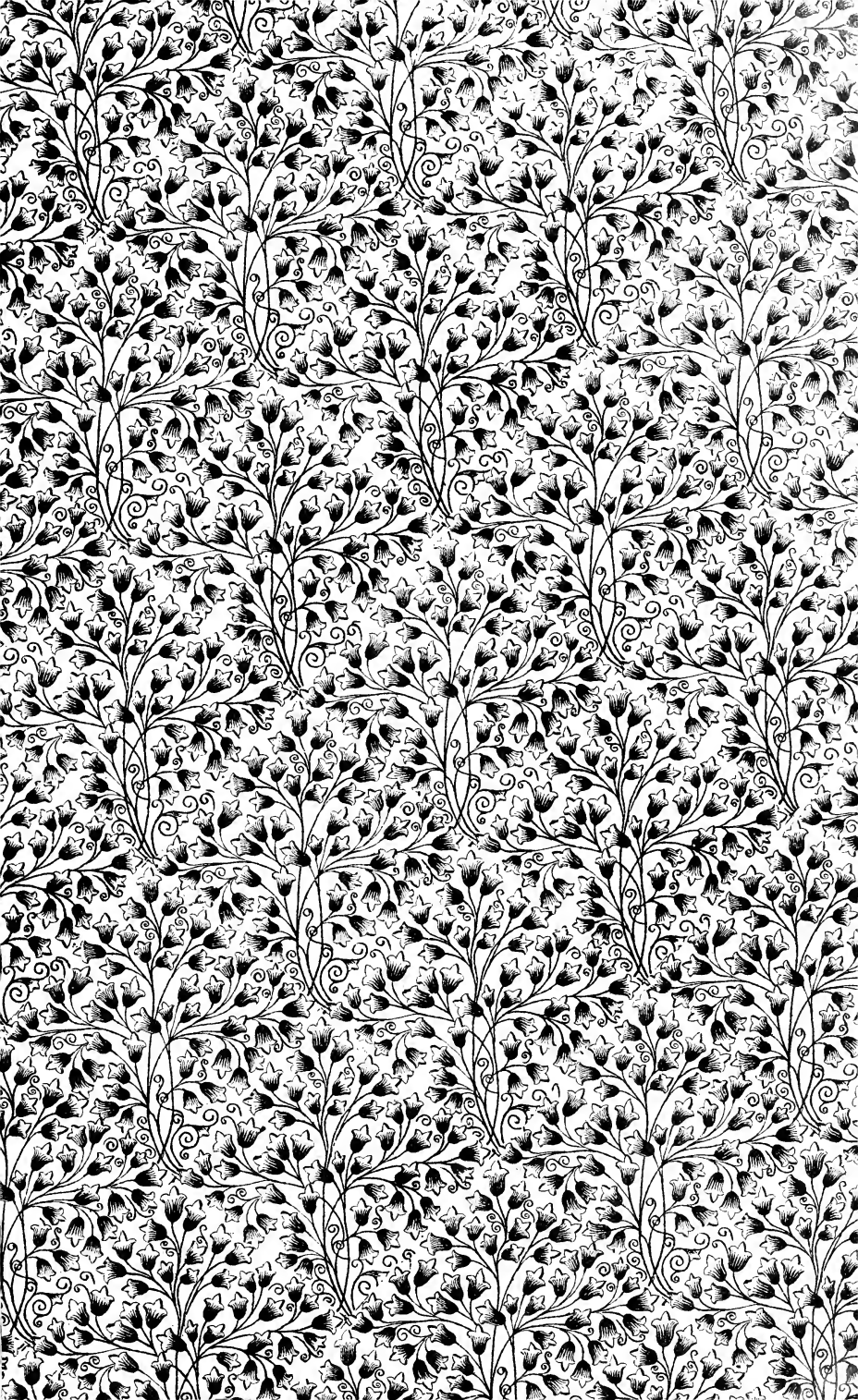


ZULULU
THE MAID OF ANAHUAC
FOSTER



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ZULULU

THE MAID OF ANAHUAC

BY

HANNA A. FOSTER



G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS

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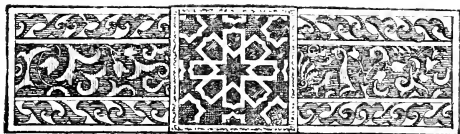
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INTRODUCTION.

THE masterly epic which celebrates the abduction of a beautiful woman, and the induction of a wooden horse, is no longer a series of myths. Its essential verities have at length been established in the priceless exhumations of the antiquarian.

The sunny lands of the Americas teem with buried evidences of a civilization which in its attendant triumphs of war and peace, and in the intensity of its loves and hates, perhaps no Homeric character could excel.

Many theories have been evolved from the speculations of the savant as to the anthropology of the successive American races which have come and gone. But no Homer or Virgil has seen fit to commemorate their heroic deeds and the tender passion of love indigenous to every clime and race and heart.

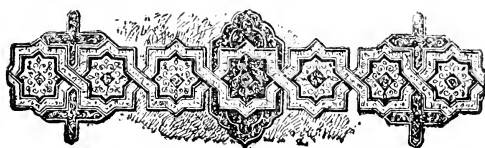
The author, while claiming no classic excellence, has patiently studied so much of the history, rites, and customs of the Mayas, Nahuas, and Toltecs

as is attainable, and selecting the golden era of peaceful progress betwixt the gruesome periods reddened with human sacrifices, has sought to sing a tale of passion, tragedy, and romance consistent with the chronology, fact, and tradition of which it is a part.

Ancient Mexico and Xibalba had their Oribos and Zululus, as well as their culture heroes, with whom the indulgent reader will become acquainted.

H. A. F.





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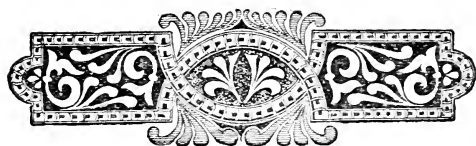
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ZULULU,
THE MAID OF ANAHUAC.

CANTO I.

ANAHUAC.

IN days of eld, that yesterday
Lost from the calendar, away
Behind the centuries gray and grand
Lay westerly the sunlit land
Of Anahuac,¹ whose mountains bold,
White-hooded chroniclers grown old,
Stood up in heaven's eternal calm
And challenged time.

A land of balm,
And bloom, and song, and murmuring rills,
Cool crystal lakes, and vales, and hills
With grassy slopes where sunshine played ;
Of unhewn forests ripe with shade
Far stretching like a sombre sea,
Intense with depth and mystery—

The haunt of life so free and wild
That Nature wondered at her child.
A land the very gods did love
What time they lifted her above
The fevered zone to healthful heights,
And crowned her with untold delights.²

Here, dwelt in olden pomp and power,
The gallant chief Oxac,³ the flower
Of chieftancy. With dauntless heart,
Alert, and skilled in war's red art,
Of balanced brain and nery hand,
A man to counsel, lead, command.
Though many hundred moons had shed
Their silver on his princely head,
His stalwart form was all unbent
As when to earliest war he went
A stripling brave ; his keen, black eye
Undimmed, still read the lettered sky
And marked the planets as they beat
Their azure rounds with shining feet
To score the cycles in their flight
On mile-stones of primeval night.

A double nature his ; though mild
As zephyr's breath, yet fierce and wild
As hurricane that plucks the oak,
Or fells a forest by his stroke.
A man of subtle, sudden moods,
Who forth to abstract solitudes
Would oft compel his noble heart

From human sympathy apart,
Withdraw within himself, content
With narrowest environment
If but the world might be shut out,
The gods shut in with thoughts devout
And questioning. But when again
Came Oxac to the life of men,
The world of duty, beauty, sense,
Bore impress of omnipotence ;
Affairs of state, love's gentle call,
He noted, heard, and heeded all.
His soul absorbed the warm delights
Of summer lands, all sounds, all sights,
At glow of noon, or twilight dim,
Were marvellously sweet to him.

He swayed the power of felt command,
Held justice's scales with steady hand,
Marked with exactness each offence,
Its gravity and recompense,
And dealt with prompt relentless fate,
The awful penalties of state.*

Of royal birth, with rightful claim
To rich inheritance of name,
Ancestral wealth, and power and pride,
Yet would he often turn aside
With Nature, when like dreams of night
The shadows melted into light,
And new-born day, baptized with charms,
Sprang joyous from her gracious arms.

At noontide hour he sought her, far
From life's distracting noise and jar,
For converse sweet ; and when the gray
Of twilight veiled the weary day,
Adown her evening avenues
O'erhung with stars and paved with dew
Full oft he followed.

Nature spells
Her laws by easy syllables
To those who trace o'er pages white
Her index finger tipped with light.
A pupil apt, he understood
Her whispers in the solemn wood,
Her sighs among the mountain pines,
Her breathings 'mid the valley vines,
All paths her foot was wont to press ;
He heard the rustle of her dress
As through the golden maize she sped,
And touched his lips, and bowed his head.

Yet more ; his will was held in thrall ;
His soul was full of worship ; all
Her mighty forces meekly bent
Before the gods ' omnipotent
Who gave the sunshine and the shower,
And victory in the doubtful hour
Of conflict, or with vengeance dire
Sent tempest, pestilence and fire,
With sore disaster. To appease
The rage of angry deities

And hold their favor, Oxac reared
Full many a temple, and well steered
His craft of state through calm and swell,
By faith's unquestioned oracle.

The valley held in warm embrace
A pretty lake with dimpled face
O'er which the rippling laughter skipped,
Where song-birds from her fresh lips sipped
Love's liquid melodies, which made
An Eden of the sylvan shade.

From hidden homes among the hills,
Came prattling down the merry rills,
O'er shining sands and pebbles white,
Fair wantons, dancing with delight.

From distant northland, calm and strong,
A river rolled ; with bloom and song
The margin meadows sought to stay
The steadfast pilgrim on his way ;
He tarried not ; within his soul
Eternal purpose held control,
While deep-toned voices from the sea
Urged onward to his destiny.

Like some huge giant in repose,
His heaving breast o'erspread with snows,
In slumbers ominous and deep,
Now shivering, talking in his sleep,

Old Popocatepetl * lay,
His knees enwrapped with green and gray
Thick-woven, and his hoary head
High-pillowed and cloud-canopied.

Low at his feet among the flowers,
Were villages with walls and towers,
And busy throngs who spun and wrought
Life's wondrous web of deed and thought.⁷
Ho, weavers of that long ago,
What word for us ?

“ 'T is well to know
As flies the shuttle to and fro
The pattern grows, and not in vain
Does patience hold the tangled skein,—
A break, a knot in thread of gold
Will mar the web a thousand-fold.”

The royal city Iztapeç *
Rose in her beauty from the wreck
Of one despoiled ; more proud perchance,
Because of direful circumstance
Which shook the olden city down,
But left a name, and fair renown,
And broad foundations, hers at length,
Her polished stepping-stones to strength.

Within this city Oxac built
His palace home, o'erlaid with gilt
The ceilings of its massive halls,
And covered lustrous floors and walls

With legends writ in picture words,
Of gods and heroes, serpents, birds,
And characters of strange designs
Described by geometric lines,
All chronicled in colors ^{so} sure ;
And every room had garniture
Of regal opulence and ease.

Soft swung the door-way draperies,
Their silvery fringes flashing back
Bright glances on the zephyr's track—
The zephyr, that in wanton mood
Oft floated from the odorous wood
The palace seeking, and beguiled
By gentle breathings of the child
Zululu,¹⁰ lingered while she slept,
Nor thought o'er long the watch he kept.

Zululu was the chieftain's pride,
His only child ; he could not hide
His heart from her whose winsome grace
Would chase the care-cloud from his face,
And light his eye—she could but know
It was because he loved her so.
Ten summers in her path had strewn
Their blossoms, and ten times had flown ;
A little maiden full of glee,
And happy all the day was she ;
As lightsome as the gay gazelle
That bounds along his native dell

'Neath Afric skies, and questioning
All things for joy—and everything
Returned glad answer ; thus she grew
Beloved, and beautiful, and true ;
Her heart as tuneful and unstirred
By thought of ill, as May-time bird
That cleaves the blue. When from the chase
Oxac returned, her glad young face
First met him with its greeting fair,
The sunset's gold upon her hair,¹¹
And wealth of sparkles in her eyes,
As dancing down the galleries
In gay apparel, on his sight
She flashed, a vision of delight.

Companions they, in fields and bowers,
Together learned the names of flowers,
Their lovely natures and designs,
The while for consecrated shrines
Zululu many a garland bound,
With reverent love, unfearing crowned
Her temple gods. But when her hands
Grew weary, and on fragrant bands
Lay folded, Oxac would retell
Some wonder story, woven well
Of legendary thread spun out
From years forgotten, wound about
By weird ideals, but with form
Defying cataclysmal storm,
Which stood above the misty sea
As traced upon eternity.

LEGEND OF CHOLULA.¹²

Far away in the past, in the beginning,
Ere the light of the sun had been created,
Lifeless, and void, and dark with desolation,
A dreary waste, by boundless seas surrounded,
Lay this fair land, the home of the Nahuas.¹³
At length arose the sun and scattered darkness.
Then was the land possessed by men gigantic,
With faces terrible, and forms distorted,
Who stalked abroad and looked with eyes audacious

Upon the sun—his rising and his setting,
And said, "Lo, we will seek him in his chamber";
Then some swift-footed toward the far west journeyed,

And others eastward, yet were all turned backward
By the wide sea. Then came they to Cholula
And built a mighty tower with summit lifted
To touch the sky. "Now in his unveiled beauty,
In matchless glory bathed, shall we behold him."

Their impious words heard the Great Heart of
Heaven,

And to the dwellers of the heights celestial
Out spoke with mighty voice: "Come and confound them!

Earthborn, they build of clay with hands polluted,
A highway to the heavens. Amazing folly!"
Like lightnings fierce, down swept the starry
legions

And smote the tower with terrible destruction,

Each man in speech made alien to his fellow,
And scattered swift and wide the wicked builders,
Whose deeds Cholulan ruins scarce remember,
Whose names Cholulan ruins have forgotten.

Long time intent, the dark-eyed child
Would listen, led through mazes wild
To many a wonder-land remote
From modern thought, her magic boat
Wide waters sailing toward green shores,
Where dimpled hands might drop their oars,
And softly anchor to the past
An atom in that misty vast !
With foot untired, and vision clear,
She breathed the marvellous atmosphere
Of deluged worlds, and races lost,
And paths primeval darkly crossed
By fate. Yet had she greed of good.
She loved and better understood
The story of the god " benign,
Whose name and virtues all divine
So charmed her that the pure and true
Into her very being grew ;
While thoughts that knew no form of speech
Grew restless with desire to reach
New altitudes, where questions find
Plain answers. For each human mind
Instinctive tries its pinioned wings,
And each, in touch with unseen things
Is neighbor to his fellow : Where ?
It matters not ; that vital air

Inbreathed at birth, all life inspires—
Through all gradations ; its desires,
Ambitions, loves, hates, hopes, and fears,
To all climes native, through all years
Immortal.

Love did so unite
The chieftain and his child ! his might
Zululu crowned and glorified
With all a daughter's trust and pride.
Her simple plays he stooped to share,
Her wishes were his sacred care ;
However oft, his hour of rest
Invading with the fair request,
'T was Oxac's pleasure to repeat
The story that she deemed so sweet.

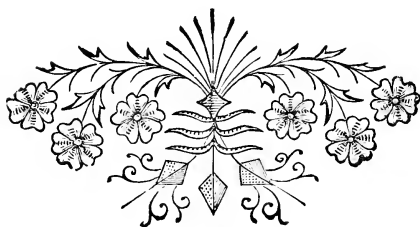
LEGEND OF QUETZALCOATLE.¹⁶

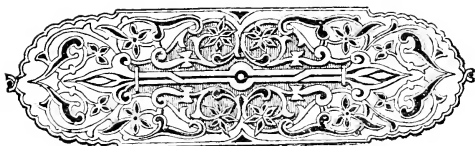
From the far east—from Hue-Hue-Tlaplan,¹⁶
Came the Divine One, God of the Nahuas,
The Plumed Serpent, guardian of his people,
Who brought the golden maize to Tamoanchan,¹⁷
In furrows long did hide the seeds of plenty,
And bid the gentle south winds breathe above
them,
The vernal showers, life giving, drop their fulness,
Till woke, and rose, and in the sunshine ripened
Abundant harvests, making glad our fathers.
Great was their god, beneficent and gentle.
With holy hands he cleansed their bloody altars

And made them pure and bright with fruits and
flowers,
Empurpled clusters, eglantines, magnolias ;
From mountain pines their gums, and from the
valley
Vanilla odoriferous, and spices.
Then fled from Anahuac war, want, and famine,
Nor found in all the land a habitation,
Because the God of Peace—the Plumèd Serpent,
By virtuous precepts, and divine behavior,
Made wise the people, in all arts benignant ;
Taught them to fill their store-rooms with abundance,
Enlarge their villages, and build great cities ;
To feed with unstained hands their sacred fires
And worship worthily the Heart of Heaven.

Above the ruins of that impious tower,
Hurled earthward by the mighty sky god mad-
dened,
The brave Nahuas in their hero's honor
Built this eternal temple of Cholula,
Where we, proud children of a race illustrious,
His shrines enwreath with flowers of fond affection,
And burn sweet incense on his sacred altars,
Till he shall come again from far Tlapala—
That unknown and mysterious country, whither
In a canoe of serpent skins embarking
He sailed away, leaving his happy kingdom,
His palaces of turquoise, gold, and silver,

His pyramidal temple, and his people—
For so the feverish draught of Tulla¹⁸ prompted.
But by and by shall ope the gates of morning,
From distant northland, waters wide recrossing,
Shall come to Anahuac the Plumèd Serpent,
The God-King of our fathers, the Nahuas,
To claim his kingdom prosperous and perpetual.





CANTO II.

THE ORACLE.

ONE night a foolish dream he had
Which troubled Oxac ; though he bade
The vision vanish at the dawn,
It shadowed him—would not be gone.
The dream was this :

Deep in the wood,
With spirit bold, and weapon good,
He followed fearless and afar
Through darksome wilds the jaguar ;
So near at length his savage prize
He saw the flash of deadly eyes
From covert green ; alert, intent,
His trusty bow the huntsman bent
With skillful hand ; but ere was sped
The eager arrow, o'er his head,
From lowest perch of scraggy oak,
An evil bird with dismal croak
Surprised him ! thrice it circled low,
Then rose, and with a voice of woe
Flew straight to Iztapeç, and through
The palace window, bloom and dew

With black wing brushing, thence did wrest
A pretty dove from sheltered nest,
The which, with hoarse, defiant croak,
He bore away.—So Oxac woke.

There was a priestess weird and old,
Blind, wizened, bent, whose fingers cold
And cramped the oracles could trace,
With whom the gods talked face to face.
The dream—it haunted Oxac's thought,
And though he said " 'T is naught, 't is naught,"
The resolute assertion lent
No mollient to his discontent,
Which prompted to the sibyl's art,
And deeming heavier on his heart
The burden of a nameless dread
Than direful dream interpreted,
He rose, and from his chamber strode,
Though half in scorn, to her abode,
A grewsome den to night allied ;
With reckless hand he drew aside
The poison vines which wove across
The door-way dim from sedgy fosse
To bramble bold, and peering in
Beheld her, and his peace to win
Invoked with fitting gifts the shrine
Of rites mysterious and divine,
And prostrate, but with quickened sense,
Gave all her wild words audience.

“ Before my eyes, without disguise,
O chief, the vision lies :

“War, waste, and woe ; a foe, a foe,
A kingdom’s overthrow !

“A tangled thread, the dead, the dead !
A chieftain with bowed head.

“A knave, a knave ! a brave, a brave !
Zululu weds her slave !”

Upspringing from the earth, he fled
As chased by doom ; his stricken head
By clammy palm upheld and pressed,
His throbbing brain all wildernessed
With tangled thought. The round old world
Before him into chaos whirled ;
The ground was treacherous to his tread,
The atmosphere dispirited
With suffocation, and the light
Scorched his wild eyeballs into night.

His palace gained, he sought a nook
In distant chamber, and betook
Himself to battle. Fierce the strife
Within his bosom.

“What were life
To me and mine, if cruel fate
Shall hurl us from this proud estate
And rude barbarians trample down
My people, city, and renown ?
For this hath Oxac fearless fought
His country’s deadliest battles—brought

Strange banners home, and victory ?
So thus the gods reward him ! aye,
For *this* his child—it shall not be !
A curse upon the prophecy ! ”

Rage is a fearful tonic ! through
His vigorous frame the fury flew.
Of iron nerve, he seemed to stand
Invincible, with clenched hand,
And lips compressed, and eyes aglow
With angry fires ; then to and fro
His chamber paced. Not more enraged,
The jungle tiger, captured, caged
By bars invisible.

“ A fate

He scorns, doth Oxac meekly wait ?
Who stands ? Who ventures to fulfil
Designs resisted by his will ? ”
The impious words were scarcely said,
When through an open window sped,
As answering all, in echoes low,
And sweet, and near, in rhythmic flow,
The breath of music, and the name
Of Oxac blent in proud acclaim.

“ Thy realm is broad and fair,
Thy vassals sturdy and true ;
About thee is wrapped the odorous air,
And the skies above are blue.

We have heard the fame
Of thy mighty name

In our home by the far-away sea ;
Come we with greeting to thee—to thee,
Great Oxac.”

Anear the window low he bent
His ear, to catch the wonderment.

“ Thy heart is warm and bold,
Thy treasures gather no rust ;
Thy temple shrines are garnished with gold,
And thy gods are wise and just ;
We have heard the fame
Of thy mighty name
Sung by the shells of our sweet south sea.
Come we with greeting to thee—to thee,
Great Oxac.”

The spellbound chief in attitude
Now upright stands—his brow bedewed
By sudden drops—his maddened soul,
As sprayed from God’s baptismal bowl,
In reverent silence reconciled,
Subdued in spirit as a child.
His evil mood had taken flight
And left him in a strange delight,
His good stout heart, in weak amaze,
Quite vanquished by the breath of praise.

“ Thy hand is strong and brave,
It gathereth fame from far ;
Thy praises are echoed in coral cave,
And sung in the morning star.

'T is a deathless song,
We have heard it long ;
For it floateth o'er mountain and sea ;
Bring we a greeting—a message to thee,
Great Oxac."

Within the palace Oxac brought
His courtly visitors, and wrought
Prompt hospitality and fair,
With princely hand, and gracious air
To greatness native, and with few
But fitting words of welcome true
To promptings of his noble breast,
Allured to banqueting and rest.

In audience-hall wide-walled, ornate,
On rich official chair of state
Bright-canopied and many-staired,
Next morn sat Oxac. Thence repaired
The strange ambassadors, low bent,
In mien and posture reverent,
By choicest phrase well taught to bear
Their royal message. Otherwhere
Seemed Oxac's thought, and yet he gave
A courteous ear.

The architrave
Of soul is sense—it must be so ;
To see, to hear, is not to *know* ;
The tongue may prattle many a day
When soul is silent or away ;
Sense answers to the fingerings
Of triflers ; 't is the soul that sings.

The royal message Oxac heard
Like one who dreams ; each tone and word,
O'erfull of meaning vague, or good
Or ill, not clearly understood.

“ Know thou, great Oxac, that our king—
 Good Kayi,¹⁹—he who beareth sway
 Throughout Xibalba,²⁰ found one day,
Enshrined with many a rare forgotten thing,
An ancient record—linking thee and thine
To sires illustrious of his royal line.

“ And ye are kinsmen ; it is well.
 We come to ask for Kayi's son
 A wife—so doth our business run,
Directed by Xibalba's oracle.
The gods inspire thy words, that we may bring
A swift and gracious answer to our king.”

Then followed silence. Never fear
 Twitched Oxac's lip, or shook his knee,
Yet his great heart stood still to hear
 The answer. “ Time—a little time,” quoth he,
“ To speak the destinies of lives and states.
Noble ambassadors, my answer waits.”

In Oxac's garden was a spot
 Cool-curtained from the tiresome day ;
Retiring thither, sometimes he forgot
 The world without—Zululu at her play
Beside him. To this solitude, apart
He turned with measured steps and troubled heart.

Hour after hour alone with thought

He lingered. "Why doth Kayi seek
Alliance that with flattery could be bought ?

And what can claim of kinship else bespeak ?
A true nobility from self must spring ;
Linked to old royalty makes no man king.

"Xibalba, queen of tropic lands—

My fathers sailed the summer seas
That flung their pearls into her rosy hands ;
A haughty beauty decked with brilliancies,
Yet strong she was, and is ;—wives are there none
In all her glittering courts for Kayi's son ?"

"The son, who to his father's throne

Will come with rounded fame and age—
What then ? Zululu queen ! O thought o'ergrown !
I doubt me much, this seemly embassy,
And yet—this doubt were better than the bane
A foolish dream hath mixed for heart and brain.

"Perchance I wrong the king, the state,

Myself, my child, by doubts unkind ;
Ungenerous judgments dwell not with the great ;
Suspicion speaks a littleness of mind.
Why should I meet with a reluctant frown,
To my sweet child the proffer of a crown ?

"Yet, O my child ! my child ! what words

Thy father speaks in vexèd hours !
Could I but keep thee with the springtime birds
Nor ever miss thee from thy native bowers !

When life's dull afternoon grows shadowy,
And chill lips from the unknown whisper me,

“How shall I stretch my trembling hands,
And strain my weary eyes in vain !
O frenzied brain by flattery's breezes fanned !
Cruel, in cup of gold, the draught of pain !
A father's love by glory's glare beguiled—
Away ambition ! give me back my child !”

“Look, father ; will it die ? alas
My pretty bird you shall not die !
Good Zinco²¹ found it fluttering in the grass
And in his warm hands let its feathers dry—
But still it will not sing—it will not eat !”
So stormed the chattering maid Oxac's retreat.

“Zululu : come to me ! yes—no—
Ah, well, the bird—what did you ask ?”
“Good Zinco”—but the chieftain thundered, “Go !”
And spurned the trembling slave back to his task,
Then to Zululu, half impatiently,
“See you ! the bird is dead—throw it away !”

From that same hour was Oxac changed.
His daughter—not from her estranged—
He held her with a father's pride ;
But like the ashes of his bride
Love casketed, were thus laid by
The tenderness of tone and eye,

Endearing word, and warm caress ;
It was not that he loved her less—
His “gracious answer” had been won,
And she was pledged to Kayi’s son.

To train his heart, that it might grow
By fixed gradations to the woe
Of final loss, to be most just
Toward one for whom he held in trust
His child—no longer all his own,
His life took on a sterner tone ;
Thus, when his face a sadness wore,
She could not charm him as before,
With pretty prattle, wondering “why.”
The light was kindly in his eye,
But seemed as coming from afar,
Unsympathetic as a star
Whose silvery beams with promise rife,
Shine on, but warm not into life.

Those moods her arts could not dispel
Cast shadows which about her fell,
And followed to the woodsy shade,
Where lone and silent she would braid
Her autumn flowers—no longer bright ;
Through tears they seemed as touched with blight.
But when they faded, and the days
Grew dismal in their dumb amaze,
Zululu was not loath to cast
Her cheerless sports into the past.
What seasons chased away her spring !

Betrothed, and to a future king,
Was fitness needful, and a school
Of lengthened term and rigid rule.
What heavy counsels for her ear !
What stern commands, what tasks severe
For little hands unused to aught
Save ministries to childish thought !
Yet must the pretty princess prove
Worthy a royal husband's love.
With character well poised, and full
Of modest virtues, dutiful,
Low-voiced and gentle, cultured, kind,
With dignity of mien and mind."²²

Her fingers must be taught to wed
Their cunning to the silken thread,
To weave with patient toil and care,
In many a bold device, and rare,
Xibalba's banner ; for her lord,
With glittering gems, and golden cord
His nuptial robe.

But will she spin
Love's feathery thread ? and broider in
With dimpled fingers, birds and flowers—
The dew and sunshine of glad hours,
Bright hopes and rosy dreams ? Perchance ;
For childhood is life's sweet romance.

The seasons slowly came and went—
Zululu, on her tasks intent,

Gave little heed, but 'neath the eyes
Of Bacca,²³ set to supervise
Her education, sped away
From childhood artless, free, and gay,
To graver realm—to womanhood,
While lightly on the threshold stood
Her guileless feet.

Yet more she wrought
Than robe and banner. Love untaught,
Propelled the shuttle of her thought
Which through her soul bright-wingèd flew,
Till fancy's light creation grew
A grand ideal at whose shrine
A white life knelt with gift divine,
Her maiden love.

All virtues bore
The name of Kaska.²⁴ Unaware
She prayed to him, but One who wore
A radiant countenance, bent o'er
The hills of light and heard her prayer.
Her thoughts sometimes took voice, and trilled
A tuneful measure, and so filled
The hours with music, that the day
Though wearisome, soon stole away.

“Through and through, through and through,
Polished needle, thread of blue :—
Aye, sweet bird, I hear thy song,
But my task is long, so long !
This a royal robe must be—
Some one waits for me.

“Through and through, through and through,
Every color, every hue
Copied from the sunset skies ;
Will it glad his gracious eyes,
That this border is so fair,
 Fringed with jewels rare ?

“Through and through, through and through,
Every loop and stitch so true !
Will he love me long and well ?
How can little maiden tell ?
Words—I know not what they mean—
 ‘Kaska’s bride and queen.’

“Through and through, through and through,
Every hour some tinting new
Floats into the web I weave.
Shall Zululu joy or grieve,
That she is a little bride,
 Knowing naught beside ?

“Through and through, through and through,
Twist the roseate with the blue ;
Can a little maiden rest
Lovingly upon his breast ?
Trustfully ? it must be so—
 Aye, it must be so.”



CANTO III.

XIBALBA.

A T rest, two tropic seas between,
On flowery couch o'erarched with sheen,
Her language love, her breath the breeze
Perfumed from groves of spiceries—
Xibalba this, whose shores of green
Beyond the billowy waste were seen
By Votan,²⁵ who one elder day
Came hither with benignant sway,
And long his chosen people led—
The mighty Mayas.

Far outspread
Usumasinta's ²⁶ fertile vale,
Where marvels of an oldtime tale
Were born, matured, grew old and died.
Where rose the city of his pride
Nachan ²⁷ luxurious, built to brave
The dust of ages o'er her grave
Slow sifting.

From that ancient seat
Of culture curiously complete,
Sprang many a Maya ²⁸ branch—from one

Was Kayi,²⁹ an illustrious son
Of sires whose royal lineage ran
In line unbroken back to Chan.³⁰
Thus came to Kayi sovereignty
Of fair Xibalba. Wise was he,
His goodly kingdom ruling well
A score of Katun ³¹ years, when fell
A shadow clouding heart and mind
With apprehensions undefined.

As once he slept, strange whispers stole
Quite through the portal of the soul
And woke him trembling. Armed and starred,
About him stood his trusty guard—
Yet scarcely were his fears dispelled.
Thenceforth was doubly sentineled
His palace chamber. Ill at ease,
He dreamed of bold conspiracies
By day and night. Sometimes in guise
Of stupid slave, with downcast eyes,
And clumsy tread, and shoulders bent
With drudgery and discontent,
He threaded crowded thoroughfares ;
Or, trafficking his paltry wares,
Long loitering in the market-place,
A trader garrulous, the grace
Of barter bickerings he tried—
And now and then he would deride
King Kayi—sometimes praise, the while
He marked the answering frown or smile.

O'erwearied, Kayi sought one day
The grove's seclusion ; as he lay
Cool pillowed on perpetual green,
God's blessed curtains drawn between
Himself and feverish cares, he slept—
Yet wakefully—so constant kept
His ear its well set watch. What feet
Are those approaching his retreat—
Near, nearer, and with what intent ?
'T were well thick covert boughs low bent
Forbade their glossy leaves to part.
Above the beating of his heart
The wretched king his name o'erheard
In parable, with smothered word,
And unfledged phrases in the dark
Ill born, hushed voices hoarse and stark,
Some dreadful purpose making known
By passion's murderous monotone.

A quick discernment fear bestows ;
King Kayi recognized his foes,
Could call their names, their leader learned ;
'T was he whose soul for vengeance burned,
The old-time rebel, false Tetan,³²
Once chieftain of a powerful clan
In distant province. Years before
His neck he bent, but ever wore
The yoke defiantly. He knew
Tetan, and all, but deathly dew
By utter anguish quick distilled,
His brow o'erspread ; his life-blood chilled.

Forgot its speed from heart to brain.
Alas the blow that deadens pain !
That voice was Kaska's very own !
His son was plotting for the throne !

King Kayi spoke his fears to none,
But carefully observed his son,
While day by day confirmed his fears.
Young Kaska, grown beyond his years,
Had princely presence, and a face
Of manly beauty, with the grace
Of youthful valor. In a mould
Unblemished, dwelt his spirit bold,
Aggressive, restless, desperate
For that wild draught supposed to sate
The thirst for glory.

With what bands
We seek to bind the lawless hands
Of mad ambition stretched above
The healthful bounds of light and love
To pluck the stars, a name to win !
The fierceness of the fire within—
Who lit it knows. The same who moves
Contented souls in quiet grooves
Of small desires. The strong, swift wing
Of pride—the feeble fluttering
Of innate gentleness, confuse
Our faulty judgments ; but He views
With equal eye, the eternal strife
Of matter pulsing with a life
Uncomprehended.

Late returned
Was Kaska, from a tribe that spurned
Control ; commissioned by the king
To quell rebellion and to bring
Victorious peace—commissioned, since
For service bold the restless prince
Was fitted. Many a field is lost
We fancied won—so great its cost !

Himself a traitor, Kaska chose
Alliance with his country's foes ;
He sought the ear of old Tetan,
Well pleased to find him with his clan
All couchant for a deadly spring
Into the palace of the king !
But Kaska counselled brief delays,
And fed the fires forbade to blaze
Untimely.

In the court he knew
Were those, a despicable few
Whom bribes could buy, and those he bought—
Yet inly scorned them. Then bethought
How good Oribó^{ss} might be won,
Oribó, Kayi's younger son,
Whom all men loved ; not Kaska's peer
In lordly mien, and acts severe,
But comely, straight and tall he stood
Like some young cedar of the wood,
Sure promise of a giant good.
Than Kaska, by twelve rounded moons
The younger—but unequal noons

They neared ; one dazzled—one was fair.
For Kaska with the very air
Of childhood strange delirium drew ;
Two brothers, side by side they grew ;
Two natures, ever drawn apart.

Staunch virtues flourished in the heart
Of young Oribó. Brave at need,
He scorned a mean or cruel deed ;
He would not smite a wretch in thrall,
Nor shoot a bird to see it fall
With dripping breast and broken wing,
Because it was a helpless thing.
No greed had he for power or fame ;
With gentle actions graced his name ;
So true to self, the gods, the state,
Upright, symmetrical, ornate
Of character, without offence,
A very type of excellence.

It troubled Kaska, how to speak
Base purposes to one whose cheek
No crimeful breath had ever kissed ;
Whose clear, calm eye, above the mist
That clings to sordid lives, could scan
Unshamed the face of heaven and man.

Beneath the palms one eventide,
The prince approached his brother's side
So quietly, the quivering blooms
Half coyly yielded their perfumes.

Oribo, with a pleased surprise
Gave greeting. Royal courtesies
Were Kaska's due—his future king
Who soon to his estate would bring
A lovely bride. Yet not a thought
Of envy with his fealty wrought.

“Nay, gentle brother, sit. From thee
I ask not homage ; let me share
Thy quiet hour, and this sweet air
That comes with cooling from the sea.

“For wearied am I, and my brain
Much heated by the glare of day,
While heavy thoughts my spirits weigh.”

“Would I might ease a brother's pain.”

“Thou canst, Oribo. In the chase
To-day—whate'er its meaning be—
A wounded rabbit fled to me.”
My bosom gave it hiding-place.

“Would'st thou have sheltered it ? Say not,
I know thou wouldst—yet hear me more :
A hunted buck which fled before
His fierce pursuers, reached a spot
He could not scale.

O then to see
His desperate valor ! what a fight
He made for life ! say, was it right
To plead his cause, and set him free ?

“Nay, answer not—full well I know
The language of thy noble breast ;
Thyself wouldst plead for the oppressed,
Nor yield him to a deadly foe.

“Aye, good Oribó, thou would'st save,
Spare, and set free the hunted beast,
Pour out thy pity for the least—
But if a wounded warrior brave,
Enslaved with all his gallant clan,
And crushed to earth, and if thy hand——”

“Say on, I do not understand.”

“Dost know the chieftain, brave Tetan ?
He pleads for liberty in vain ;
The king is cruel, will not heed ;
The gods forsake us in our need
If we break not the old man's chain !”

“Hold, Kaska ! What ? Thy rash words scare
My senses hence. The king is wise—
Gods ! there is madness in thine eyes !
Thy thought is treason ! O beware !”

No further parley Kaska made ;
He clapped his hands, and from the shade
Of tree, and shrub, and fountain spray,
And wandering vines in evening's gray
Clad spectral, murderous minions sprang
Upon Oribó. Soon the clang
Of conflict through the city rang—

And Kaska's voice inspired it all.
"On, on!"—the palace ramparts fall.
They leap the moat, they scale the wall,
Those wild red demons of revolt.
They burst the door with beamy bolt,
And surging in like waves of doom,
With Kayi's blood they flood his room,
Their weapons, as with frenzy rife,
In savage greed hew out his life ;
And none essayed to stay a blade,
So basely was the king betrayed,
And so atrociously was slain !
'T is said old ruins still retain ³⁵
A crimson record of the crime ;
Deeds set in blood blush on through time.

A DIRGE.

O what a piteous thing
Is a dead king !
Come gaze upon him, ye who yesterday
Prostrate approached, come near and lay
Your hands upon his head,
And look into his eyes—
Left open when in wild surprise,
Frighted, his great soul fled !
For this your king, Kayi the wise,
Is dead.

Sweet winds, ye need not now
So fan his brow—

Too chill already is it for a crown
Of earthly honor and renown—
 Too marred by treachery.
 His good right hand is cold,
So cold it can no longer hold
A little sovereignty ;
King Kayi this, the wise, the bold—
 'T is he.

 How pallid is his cheek !
 He does not speak—
Too palsied is his tongue, to speak his will ;
His pulses rest, his heart is still,
 His dull eye nothing sees—
 It will not wake nor weep ;
These ghastly wounds, so red and deep,
Are painless all—and these
Are they that brought him sleep
 And ease.

 Alas, how small a space
 Gives greatness place !
Muffle your voices, birds and purling streams,
Withdraw, O moon, your mellow beams ;
 Let clouds the heaven o'erspread,
 And flowers refuse to bloom
For very woe, upon his tomb,
For whom we love is dead.
Ye gods, make swift the traitor's doom
 And dread.



CANTO IV.

KASKA.

I N purpose, power. He does who wills.
So men are gods ; so fate fulfils
The soul's own prophecy ; so rise
Earth ladders to meridian skies.
And builders, with but human hands,
Are toiling up from table-lands
Of common good, to dizzy heights
Where meteors flash uncertain lights
On mortal names. Or high, or low,
Make sure, O builder, as you go
That every round is strong and true !
Build well—none else can build for you.

The logic of the eye defies
Deduction ethical and wise,
That good is beauty, beauty good.
Men ever best have understood
Bright object-lessons—bowed the head
To beauty—quite apart, unwed
To worth.

Young Kaska were a king
Though from ambition's poisoned spring

Quaffed every power of soul and brain !
 As foremost on the battle plain
 With plumèd crest and stout cuirass ³⁶
 What legions fell to let him pass !
 His black eye flashing, and his foot
 As fleet as arrow bade to shoot
 A bird on wing ; his colors set
 In web of crimson, gold, and jet,
 He swept the land from coast to coast,
 Xibalba's terror, pride, and boast.

Anon the bold revolt was o'er,
 And Kayi's son in triumph wore
 The crown by treachery achieved.
 If any for the old king grieved,
 Though dumb his woe, yet Kaska's glance
 Was keener than his battle lance
 To pierce the heart ! he naught would brook
 Of olden loyalty, by look,
 Or reverent tone that touched the name,
 Or loving sigh, or flush of shame
 For treason's triumph—naught.

And yet
 Whom love hath crowned is sovereign. Let
 The kingdom quake, *his* throne is sure—
 For virtue builds of granite pure
 That cannot crumble ! Love ! O what
 Enshrines like love and wearies not
 With ceaseless vigils ?

Kaska sought
 The seizure of all loyal thought,

Himself was king in Kayi's stead.
For good Oribo, if one said
"Alas !" and dropped his eyes, 't were best
Unmarked by Kaska in whose breast
Dwelt jealous hate that smote the lips
Of pity, when the red eclipse
Which swept Xibalba's sun from sight
Gave Kaska day, Oribo night.

A night of servitude than death
More dread ; for what avails the breath
That feeds not life, but quickens pain
And lengthens woe ? The scorn, the chain,
The drudgery that day by day
Unnerves the man and wears away
His spirit, till it beats no more
With bruised wing its dungeon door—
Such was the cruel fate decreed
For good Oribo. None might plead
For him, when maddened Kaska cried
"Away !" and spurned him from his side,
The slave of old Tetan, whose blade
Red dripping, told the price he paid !

How tranquil is the tropic sky
When once the tempest has gone by !
What gentle breezes lull the deep
When sobbing waves are rocked to sleep !
So when her civil storm was spent,
Peace arched Xibalba's firmament
And hope was in the new-wrought span.

The patriot lives in many a man
Before his mighty soul is tried
By bribes and fears. From every side
They thronged the new-made king about,
And "Long live Kaska !" rose the shout
That spoke him great ! The hero takes
Complexion from his deeds. Who makes
A record for historic pen
In black, or white, must dip his pen.

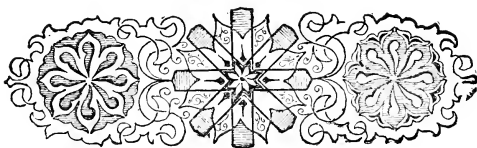
The conflict o'er, luxurious ease
The new king sought ; whate'er could please
His senses, what his pride could feed,
He summoned with a tyrant's greed ;
Refitted with peculiar care
His palace home ; with carvings rare,³⁷
Renewed each pier and court façade ;
With rich mosaics all inlaid
The spacious ceilings, walls, and floors ;
The lintels of its twoscore doors,
And double cornices embossed—
And all with master skill reglossed ;
Festooned his many royal rooms
With arras from the choicest looms ;
With sweeter fragrance, brighter flowers,
Voluptuous made his garden bowers ;
Cool fountains for his pleasure played—
To charm him, many an iris made
From showering spray when skies were blue
And sunshine softly filtered through.

Within, without, around, complete,
The city's pride, the acknowledged seat
Of power supreme, the palace stood
On old foundation strong and good,
Built up by Maya skill and might,
A marvel on her terraced height
Of solid grandeur, with a throne
The young imperial called his own.

To wait the coming of his bride
Sore vexed the king, yet must he bide
The fixed formalities of state,
Unchallenged as the voice of fate.
Betrothal bound, not his the power
To change, or speed the happy hour
By Oxac named. His restless eye
Would chase that laggard from the sky,
The cold-faced moon, whose silvery feet
Paced off slow months ! O most unmeet
His hand to cull the loveliest flower
E'er coveted for royal bower !

To somewhat bate his discontent,
A courtly embassy he sent
To Oxac, bearing lavish praise
And costly gifts, in fitting phrase
His sturdy favor to bespeak
With Kaska's greeting, and to seek
How fared Zululu—and to free
Xibalba's bird of prophecy
Within her chamber.

With a cry
Of sudden terror should it fly
Away, the omen were of ill ;
If haply, with melodious trill
Should sing as in its native wood,
'T were well—an augury of good.
Where lies in man the boundary line
Between the human and divine,
Both having place and unison
In form earth-wrought, and breathed upon
By God ? Yet dust is only dust !
A clayey casket which the rust
Of time eats through—the body is ;
And life is life—eternity's
Co-equal. Thought that spurns control,—
Each aspiration of the soul
Is God-ward, though its flight be low :
And Kaska, seeking long ago
To read the book which God had sealed,
To comprehend the unrevealed,
To grasp what hung beyond his reach,
To learn what angels might not teach
Of love's to-morrow, stretched his hands
Through oracles of olden lands
Toward one Omnipotent ! Thus hies
All soul-life toward its native skies !
Whatever form its faith may wear,
Through rudest rites or worship fair
The spirit feeling after God
Shall find Him.



CANTO V.

PORTENTS.

THE land of Oxac was at rest ;
The bow of peace from crest to crest
Of guardian mountains stretched across.
The summer, that with green, and gloss,
And shower and sunshine banished doubt,
Now bade the ripening maize fling out
His silky tresses, bade the vine
Fill all his cluster cups with wine
So pure and sweet an angel's lip
Might press their purple rims and sip.

The chieftain saw with honest pride
How thrived his realm. On every side
Brown hands were building strong and straight
In peace, the bulwarks of the state.
Old science, freed from civic jars,
Explored the skies, and read the stars—
Art hastening with his axe and block
To fix the record into rock.
Reaped industries an hundred-fold ;
They opened hill-side doors for gold,

And wrought in woods and metals pure
A curious nomenclature.

The husbandman from varied fields
Full harvests gathered ; luscious yields
Of orchard fruitage plucked, and brown
Abundance from the groves shook down.
Broad commerce held imperial place ;
Old scars were on his lifted face
But healthful currents from his heart
Made vital every village mart.³⁹

The warrior brave, to join the chase
Had noble leisure ; in the face
Of beauty gazing, might forget
His hideous war-cry and reset
His tongue to tenderness, and prove
How valorous natures yield to love.
Yet were his battle-axe and bow
At hand, and fit ; no stealthy foe
Should find unmanned his dusky arm,
His ear untuned to wars alarm.

So like an eagle bathed in light,
Clear visioned gazing from far height,
His strong wing folded ; though at rest,
Brave guardian of his high-hung nest
Dwelt Oxac, and his borders kept
With vigilance which never slept.

Like maddened wolves athirst for blood,
Impelled by famine, frost, and flood
From northern regions to a zone
Of warmth and beauty erst unknown,
A-near in threatening tides, down poured
The hungry, devastating horde.
As old-time sea-kings roamed the main,
So they the forest, vale, and plain,
With sweep as terrible, for they
Were near of kin ere seas made way
Between the continents for doubt
And washed their former footprints out.

They ranged the land from sea to sea,
The north wind not more wild and free ;
In woods primeval sometimes lost,
Their pathless wanderings led or crossed
By angry streams, whose liquid dark,
Swift dimpled by the birchen bark,
Delayed them not ; a stealthy foe
Whose savage whoop and camp-fire's glow
Knew all the wooded wilderness,
Yet knowing, many a dark recess
Of thickest green she wove for them
From clambering vine, and stalwart stem,
And low-set shrub—from whence the flash
Of glittering eyes, the yell, the crash
Of cruel weapon, oft bespoke
Some hapless hunter's fate, and woke
With orgies dread the slumberous night.³⁹
Ferocious in their untamed might,

Long tutored to a strange unrest,
They went and came, annoyed and pressed
The frontiers of Oxac's domains.

Once and again the lowland plains
Had drunk of savage blood, and fed
The fierce-fanged ocelot with their dead.
In sanguine struggle oft renewed
Though beaten back—still unsubdued.
The warrior chief of Iztaptec
But held his ugly foe in check !

The air was full of nameless fears ;
Drew on the "binding of the years,"
The cycle's close. What dreams of blood,
Disaster, pestilence and flood,
Eclipse and earthquake, near and dread,
Great Oxac's soul disquieted !

One evening on his couch he lay,
Not restfully—the cares of day
Projected shadows on his hour
Of quietude ; some troublous power
Had stirred his spirit's customary calm.
In vain the eve with hush and balm
Low breathed her benediction fair
O'er troubled brow and silvery hair.

Fatigued, disheartened, and perplexed
By problems intricate, and vexed
By border bands who dared—but fled
His vengeance long provoked, he led

His ready braves in troubled thought,
And fought, yet all unconquering, fought.

Then too—and though he closed his eyes
And sought to deem them phantasies,
Yet had he marked a bodeful thing—
The battle birds were gathering ⁴⁰ ;
All day, in mid-air poised—at eve
Their sable wings did southward cleave
The gloaming ! plenteous, warm, and red,
Their dreadful banquet shall be spread !
Unwonted tremors mocked his might,
And Oxac sickened at the sight.

But more : Xibalba's messengers
Had come and gone : through silver firs,
Down pleasant slopes by windings fair,
Came back on evening's quiet air
The echoes of outgoing feet.
But Oxac's fancies were more fleet,
More prompt at Kaska's court than they
With doubtful tidings, for no lay
Of nuptial bliss their strange bird sang,
But shrieked until the chamber rang
With terror, and Zululu fled
To Oxac's arms—her shining head
Half hidden on his breast, while tears
Bedewed the hopes of coming years !

Wore on the night, yet came not sleep
To Oxac. Through the starry deep

Looked down the gods with eyes malign,
Perchance for some neglected shrine !
O'er Luna in her fleecy dress
Forth on her round of nothingness
In space, the wild winds flung a cloud
Surcharged with tempest, near and loud.
Stood up against the piney hills
The solemn temple ; awful wills
Wrought in the elements, the breeze
Quick maddened, shook the towers and trees
Until they trembled for their hold
On granite base and hill-side mould.
Down swirled the storm king in his ire,
With tones of wrath, and breath of fire,
And hand swift sowing rain and hail,
While black wings brooded all the vale.

But Oxac heeded not ; by thought
Tempestuous was his mind distraught.
A half-forgotten dream awoke—
The oracle which ill bespoke
Zululu's fortune and his own
Again he heard ! again was thrown
Athwart his soul the dark distrust,
Defiance of the gods unjust !
He cursed the oracle of old,
Xibalba's bird, with wings of gold
And throat of venom.

With the dawn
He slumbered. All the storm was gone
When late he wakened. Some intent

Had shaped into a deed. Forth sent
The chieftain for Zululu. What
His undeveloped purpose, not
A sign betrayed ; his look was cold
And resolute, his step was bold,
As to and fro he paced his hall,
Now listening for the gentle fall
Of gentle feet somewhat delayed,
Perchance to bind a glossy braid
About her brow, or to express
By nice adjustment of her dress
Her nature's sweeter harmonies ;
Perchance—but possibilities
Take wing, as on his ears—

“ O chief,

The gods this mystery make brief ;
Zululu's room is empty, still—
Her presence answers not thy will ! ”
So spake the messenger aghast
With terror.

Fingers chill clutched fast
The heart of Oxac, and he stood
Like one bewildered in a wood,
Scarce knowing that himself were he ;
Yet soon awoke the energy
Of conscious strength, which scorned to yield
One foot of any battle-field.
The guards their wonted posts had held,
The city well was sentinelled,
Nor gate, nor street, nor corridor
Unkept amid the crash and war

That filled the air with deafening sound,
And shook the palace, drenched the ground,
Poured torrents down the mountain path
And smote the temple in their wrath.
And yet were demons of the night
In league with the mysterious flight
Of fair Zululu and her maid !

The fragrant breath of morning swayed
The drapery of her chamber charmed
By soft confusion, and alarmed
By feet unwonted ; on the floor
The pretty veil Zululu wore
When summoned by the chief to meet
The embassy ; a garland sweet,
But slowly fading, grieved away
Its little life, and near it lay
A coronal of pearls, the gift
Of Kaska ; on her couch a drift
Of gorgeous stuffs, in gold and green,
And crimson, and in azure sheen
Her light apparel for the days
Delicious, when the sunshine plays
With dewy sweetness.

O to come

Within a room where nought is dumb,
And everything says " Gone ! " Aye, more,
Says " Gone—we know not whence ! " The lore
Of anguish this, the choke-damp air
Of desolation and despair !

There are who live, not knowing why,
Or how, save that they cannot die !
There are, who suffer grief and loss—
Great souls, whom tempests beat and toss
But cannot sink ; who ply the oar,
Their compass keep, and make the shore !
And such seemed Oxac.

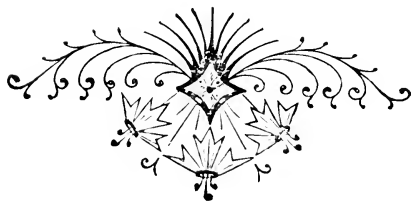
Who endures
With courage what he must, half cures
His pain, grows strong, and speeds his night
By counting stars that give him light.

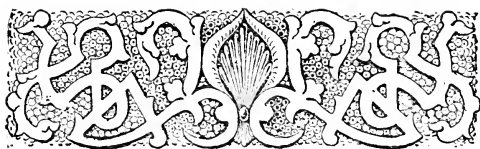
Within the palace and without
Each nook was searched, in and about
Guards stationed. Through the city sped
The tidings swift, because so dread.
All day the fruitless search was pressed,
The sacred shrines anew were dressed,
And Oxac, humbled to the dust,
Implored the gods he deemed unjust.

What flashed the fancy on his brain
That checked his prayer ? His bosom's pain,
In momentary frenzy died !
He called a chosen few, and cried :
“ Pursue Xibalba's embassy !
Bring back my stolen child to me ! ”

No sooner heard their chief's command,
Than sprang to arms the honored band—

Enthusiasts, by the gods endowed
With fateful zeal, the prompt and proud
Avengers of great Oxac's wrong !
Amid the cheering of the throng
At set of sun they marched away,
Soon lost to sight in evening's gray.





CANTO VI.

THE FLIGHT.

“GOOD Bacca, courage ; like a reed
Thou quakest ! wherefore ? for our need
The blue-eyed lightnings—how they play
Along our path ! A curious way—
I stumbled on it when a child,
Its very mystery beguiled
Me hither. Softly ! we are near
The low, dark entrance—do not fear
But follow.”

’T was a granite hall,
Low-roofed and tortuous, floor and wall
The gods well laid, what time was hewn
The sacred chamber dim with rune
To which it led.

“ Hold fast my hand
Good Bacca,” with the sweet command
Zululu drew her on. Low bent,
On, through, and up the wild ascent
They groped their way into a night
Unmooned and starless ! Left and right
The passage broadened more and more,

The ceiling lifted from the floor,
Until they stood within a room
Capacious, hung with heavy gloom
And full of silence. Whispered low,
Zululu :

“ Bacca, well I know
The god is here—I feel his breath
Upon my cheek ! ’t is chill as death
Had touched his lips :—yet fear I not ;
To this secure but awesome spot
He well hath brought us—well will keep—
And he will give us rest and sleep.”

Small service Bacca’s to compose
Their scarlet cushions for repose,
To shake the royal mantle out
And wrap the pretty form about
And whisper “ Peace ”—the good-night word
Zululu’s ear had ever heard
Ere sleeping ; but as ne’er before
She caught the meaning which it bore—
A trustful calm—a full release
From wakeful woe—“ Peace, Bacca, peace,
And restful slumbers.”

Wearied they—
So long and rough had been their way,
With needful stores so laden ; rest
Came soon and sweet, beyond the quest
Of swift pursuit ; for none would brave
A near approach to Quizquo’s “ cave !

Far up the mountain's wooded side
There yawned a chasm deep and wide—
Weird antechamber of his hall ;
One only doorway, dim and small,
The dreadful god had left ajar,⁴²
Nor had it need of guard or bar
To halt unhallowed feet—he sent
So prompt and fierce a punishment.

About this cave with terrors fraught,
Old half forgotten legends wrought
With dim complexities of sense
Enduring ramparts of defence ;
What hunters over-venturesome
Who never from the chase had come !
What chastisement for folly, borne !
What fleeing shrivelled souls forsworn
Celestial good ! rash souls who tried
To push th' eternal doors aside,
To seek with avaricious eyes
The stores within his treasures !
Clouds, smoke, and earthquake scared the land
When Quizquo lit his awful brand
From Popocatepetl's fires,
And smote unnumbered bloody pyres.

Yet never had Zululu feared
The mountain god her faith revered,
The being whom her guileless sense
Had clothed with fair omnipotence.
A god all virtuous and wise

She saw him—never in disguise
So ugly as to fright away,
In visions or by night or day
Her sweetest thoughts of love and might.
She oft had listened with delight
The low-voiced winds and rippling streams,
His lullabies to charm her dreams,
And guide her through the mazy round
Of pilgrimage to holy ground.

She had a quiet, reverent trust
In Quizquo—she believed him just,
And therefore good ; instinctive took
Her gracious creed from Nature's book.
She knew that tiniest blossoms grew
Anear the chasm, all gemmed with dew,
And by divine afflation fed,
So strangely fair and perfected !
And she had seen the song-bird swing
The feathery brake, and dip his wing
In brimming basins cool and brown
Where danced perpetual waters down
From hidden fountain ; she had heard
Soft harmonies as zephyrs stirred
Boughs amaranthine, to imbreathe
The shadowy silences beneath.

“ He loves the birds, and flowers, and trees,
With all their fine affinities
For human souls—it must be true
He loves their friend Zululu too.”

So when the bird with evil strain
Had burned into her throbbing brain
And smitten soul its withering
Of spring-time hopes, while that dull thing
The world calls "life" stretched on and on,
She knew not whither—lost in woe
To-morrows, shivering had she flown
The scene, and in her room alone
With Bacca, sought to burst the bands
Of anguish ; wrung her helpless hands
In reckless woe, and murmuring wept
Till slowly to his setting crept
The hazy sun.

Then like a flower
Grown strong 'neath heaven's baptismal shower
She dried her tears, stood up and said :
" 'T is well—Zululu will not wed
Xibalba's king. Nay, do not chide—
No longer is this Kaska's bride,
But Oxac's daughter ! Mark her well
Good Bacca ; in her breast doth dwell
His stalwart soul ; her pulses thrill
Obedient to a master will—
Her grand inheritance. The past
How bright ! The future overcast
With clouds, the present full of pain,
Regrets, and longings, drenched with vain
And senseless tears which were beguiled
By sudden woe ! a chieftain's child,
I scorn them, and these southern gems !
What were a thousand diadems

Paled with disaster, to a brow
Disquieted ?

The gods endow
True lives with suffering to invite
The soul to tempt a skyward flight
With strong, swift wing, though in the dark.
See ! shadows beckon, lightnings mark
Our pathway ; let us flee and hide,
Till Kaska shall forget his bride !
Up, up the mountain's rugged side
Is Quizquo's cave—nay—start not thus !
A god so great will care for us,
Since pitiful he is and good
To all the weaklings of the wood."

'T was thus Zululu won her maid
To service perilous, and stayed
Her fluttering heart, and sped the task
Of preparation. 'Neath the mask
Of friendly darkness, in disguise
They passed adown the galleries,
Like shapeless shadows, out, and through
The massive walls !

Zululu knew
Where lay—his gray head in the dust—
A stone that late had fled his trust
And left an opening near the ground ;
With careful stilly search she found
The portal which no sentry kept,
And through it unperceived they crept.



CANTO VII.

THE CONFLICT.

DAYS passed—how long and desolate
To Oxac, o'er his daughter's fate
Perturbed and tortured 'neath the dense,
Chill, heavy clouds of dumb suspense !

Days passed—how long and dull they seemed
To Kaska ! days all unredeemed
By worthy purpose ; incomplete
Because by noble deeds and sweet
Unrounded. 'T is no idle thing—
The moment that with golden wing
Flies backward to eternity
Full freighted, thoughtless soul, by thee !

Day after day with love's surmise
Went Kaska forth, his eager eyes
Far sweeping the horizon's rim
From early dawn, till twilight dim,
To catch some sign for eye or ear
Bespeaking the approach and near
Of long-expected embassy—
E'er yet they came.

What though their way
Lagoons debarred and streams unspanned,
Dark wooded hills and seas of sand ?
Though rough and perilous and long
The route from thymy groves of song
To loveliest vale of Anahuac ?
To Kaska, trifling as the rack
Of summer skies a breath might chase,
Obstructions seemed—they found no place
With him.

At length their coming tread
He heard and more. Old courtiers bred,
With tongue persuasive trained to reach
By dainty idioms of speech
Unwelcome truths, led through the maze
Of foreign favor, gifts, and praise,
Till Kaska warned the dallying tongue !
With eagerness he caught, but flung
Aside the tidings ere half told,
Discerned the doubt 'neath tissued fold !—
“ The beautiful Zululu led
From sweet seclusion, with her head
Low bent, and cheeks aflame, to see
And hear the bird of prophecy !
Its brilliant plumage charmed her eye,
But when, with strange terrific cry
It fled her gentle hand in fright,
She wept and stole away ! ”

A light
Unheralded his dark eye flashed,
And blood impatient hotly dashed

His cheek, the while he smiled in scorn—
An ominous smile of passion born,
And charged with wrath !

“ Ha ! go,” he said,
His proud lips tremulous, “ go shred
Your pretty story in the ears
Of slaves !—my promised bride in tears !
My palace brooded by the bird
Of destiny ! yet know—a word
Of this,—a sign, a look, a breath—
Is certain ignominious death ! ”

His lords withdrawn, the king conferred
With power and pride ; to kill the bird,
Defy the omen, and possess
His bride they counselled him, nor less
His will approved. Should he, a king
Whose sceptre was no trifling thing,
Yield his prerogative to fate
Like men uncrowned, dispassionate,
Who, menaced by a fear, forswear
The god within ? To will—to dare—
The two fierce forces known to lead
Success—he yoked them for his need !

“ No bird in all the land,” he cried,
“ Shall fright from Kaska’s arms his bride ! ”

Ere long a sullen hum awoke ;
A shapeless sound which grew and broke
In tones discordant—tones that seemed

But meaningless to him who dreamed
Of coming bliss, till swelled the sound
To sudden tumult ; from the ground
It rose imperious, and wrought
Its interdict of happy thought.

A warrior band was at his gate,
Strong-armèd strangers, desperate
And rude of speech.

“ In Oxac’s name—
By his command, we come to claim
His child—Zululu ! These demands
To Kaska ! from his crafty hands
Be swift release or shall he know
The vengeance of a northland foe.
Go—speed the message to the throne ! ’

“ By all the gods let blood atone
The base indignity ! Breaks thus
This Oxac most perfidious,
Our sacred bond ? False-hearted chief !
He seeks a quarrel—be it brief
And hot ! ”

So cried the king in wrath—
Enraged as if across his path
A serpent venomous did crawl,
He stamped the fair floor of his hall,
And glared with frenzied eyes adown
Upon the tumult of the town.
For forth to red encounter sprang
A host of ready braves ! Out rang

The cry "Avenge the king's disgrace !"
With battle-axe and pointed mace,⁴³
And ponderous hammer, dart, and spear,
Enraged by hate that blinded fear,
In close encounter foe met foe
Where deadly thrust, and crushing blow
Threw wide the door of swift escape
For many a warrior soul, from shape
Rough hewn to earth.

Yet all in vain
Strove Oxac's noble few ; their slain
High heaped the gateway where they fought,⁴⁴
Till stood but two, who well bethought,
"What boots it thus to throw away
Our lives in this unequal fray ?"
Forth through the murderous lines they broke,
The while in awful fury woke
The wild pursuit—o'ercome at length
By northern courage, speed, and strength !—
On, on to Anahuac !

Not long
Might Oxac suffer seeming wrong
To pass unpunished. Far and near
Vindictive tongue, and eager ear
Conveyed, and drank the maddening tale ;
And soon re-echoed all the vale
With loud "To arms !" and soon a host
Of dusky braves with threat and boast,
And flags outflung defiantly,
Swept down the valley toward the sea.



CANTO VIII.

IN QUIZQUO'S CAVE.

“SIT close, my child, small breath for speech
Hath Bacca—nay, methinks to teach
Our tones the hush of voiceless fears
Were wise—so many tongues and ears
Hath Nature ! Would we were not come
Upon this peril ! nought is dumb,
Or blind, in all this haunt of hers ;
The very leaves are whisperers !
One like a meaning, sensuous thing,
Came floating down on high red wing
Across my path ! I hurried past,
But urged along by fitful blast
It rustling chased me as I fled—
The while a night-owl overhead
Loud called to me !

“The dead twigs beat
Their sharp retort to hasty feet
Which crushed them ! To the tell-tale breeze
Low bowed and listened all the trees ;
The very stars did on me stare !
The thorn-bush from his tangled lair

My mantle clutched—see how 't is rent !
And when I reached the steep descent
By trailing vine, and scraggy root
Made difficult, my careless foot
Struck hard a century-sleeping stone
Which woke, and leaped away, with tone
Of sullen echoes, which did say :
' A maiden came this way, this way !
Ye who seek her, follow, follow,
Follow,' till in accents hollow
Died the voice.

What if were heard
By other ears the fateful word ?
O child ! new tongues articulate
With soul, all things inanimate
Have taken on : we are betrayed !
What madness urged us to invade
This dreadful place ? The gods will hide
No longer Kaska's promised bride."

" Good Bacca, thou art wearied—lean
Upon me thus ; so would I screen
Thy trembling form from every ill ;
Thy temples burn, thy hand is chill.
Thy soul with terror seems distraught.
For two long moons, how hast thou wrought
My weal, and with what cost to thee !
Thy patience, care, and constancy
Amaze me ! all thy wanderings wild
To bring me food."

" Nay, nay, my child,

Speak of it not."

"That thou shouldst share
This solitude, these perils dare,
Doth grieve me, Bacca."

"Grieve thee? know
For thee my child, I would forego
All ease, all ill endure—yet what
Avail if Quizquo succor not?"

"Seems it so difficult to rest
A little in the shadowed nest
Of love unseen? so hard to stand
In silence, holding fast the hand
Omnipotent? shall doubt or fear
Disquiet whom the gods hold dear?
Expression of divinest thought
Is Nature.

Wherefore question aught
Of solemn wood, or quiet nook,
Or vainful owl, or babbling brook,
Or answering echoes? On thy path
Looked down the stars? O not in wrath.
Bright fluttering leaf, and nodding tree,
And zephyr soft, on ministry
Of mercy, all methinks were sent
To whisper 'peace.'"

"O what hath lent
Thy soul its fatal trust? Yet fly!
Perchance to tarry is to die"—

"Perchance to *live*, but what is life?
A little breath in constant strife

With fatal forces ? O methinks
The soul is bound by golden links
To life that feeds not in this air—
A more of life and elsewhere !
How thought in this retreat hath grown,
In converse with the gods ! unknown,
Yet near, so near that I have caught
Immortal breathings which have taught
Old words new meanings.

What is death ?

Oft have I watched with bated breath
When stilly night was at its noon,
The burial of the beauteous moon—
Yet hath she ever risen—no beam
Of beauty lost !

Beside the stream

That wanders through our pleasant vale
I know a bank where violets pale
In spring-time waken from a sleep
Refreshful, though so long and deep !
And I have called it death—that strange
Withdrawal, where they rest, and change
Their faded hues for fairer.

So

Methinks to die—is but to go
Apart a little, and lay by
My dusty dress—for shall not I
Be still Zululu ? still the same
In thought and look, my very name
Mine ever ? In my conscious breast
Something asserts it. Not dull rest,

But truer, freer life, that goes
Straight through the shadow of repose
Into the morn—”

Unheralded
The awful shock ! It burst o’erhead
With fiery bolt, and thunderous stroke
Which thrilled the cavern, and bespoke
The mountain god ! Around, and o’er,
Were jar, and deafening crash, and roar,
With quivering walls on either side,
And granite ceiling parting wide !

Upheaved the rocky floor and fell
Uncertain o’er the deadly swell
Of molten billows mad with fire,
And quenchless as great Quizquo’s ire.
The dim small doorway to their hall
Closed slowly into solid wall,
And all was over !

O to beat
The door close shut to hope’s retreat !
To know the great bright world apart
Whirls on, nor heeds the throbbing heart
Entombed ! yet patience, gentle souls !
Yes, fold your puny hands, and pray !
God’s blessèd angel sometimes rolls
The stone of sepulture away.



CANTO IX.

AFTER THE BATTLE.

A WOKE the vale of lakes and rills,
Of Iztapeç the templed town,
As o'er the shoulders of the hills
Soft veiled, the morning sun looked down,

On many a home where children played,
And patient mothers toiled the while ;
Where o'er her task, the black-eyed maid
Recalled her brave with sigh and smile,

Nor thought o'erlong the fibrous seams,
As swift her cactus needle flew—
For love was fashioning from dreams
A robe of gossamer and blue.

And white-haired men whose wars were o'er,
Smoked on in silence and apart : ⁴⁶
Or sitting by the cabin door
They shaped and barbed the arrowy dart.

From polished wood, shell, tooth, and bone,
Rare implements and trinkets made, ⁴⁶

Or chiselled from the gray-green stone
The huge head crusher, axe, and blade.

And aged matrons chanted low
To dusky babes upon their knees
The god-like feats of Manabaho,⁴⁷
The wild exploits of Papukewis,⁴⁸

And strong-armed Kwasind,⁴⁹ hearing which
Youths grew ambitious, rushed to wars ;
By deeds of daring sought a niche
Beside the god who counted scars,

And gave long fame. Thrice blessed he
With life grown strong, and straight, and white
Into its immortality
Among the stars and crowned with light.

Against a slope of faded green
Stood up the temple facing bold
The sun, whose burning eye had seen
Her altars lit in cycles old.

Trod to and fro the dark-browed priest
In solemn service ; weird and tall
His shadow, which the glowing east
Flung back on the vermilion wall,⁵⁰

Where sacred signs by time unspoiled,
Were lithographed by hands at rest ;
And where in awful beauty coiled
The serpent with the feathered crest.

And countless, curious forms outgrown
By mighty souls, long time embalmed ;
Heroic shapes that lived in stone ;
Brave barks eternally becalmed

Hark ! what of rumor brings the breeze
Fresh from the southland ? Old men rise,
Rebuke their late enforced ease,
Their deaf ears bend, and cast their eyes

Adown the vale ; and women leave
Their uncrushed maize, and shade their brows,
And look, and listen, to retrieve
Their fancies from the shimmering boughs.

See ! nearer, clearer, lo, they come
With chants of victory—Oxac's braves !
Loud welcomes greet the warriors home
And taunt their many hapless slaves,

Xibalban captives ! War's red hand
Smote heavily, snatched Kaska's crown,
Flung far his sceptre of command,
And slew the tyrant—tearing down

The standard of his pride and power !
Though terrible, yet brief the strife ;
Alas for him whose final hour
So reaps the follies of his life !

Now, O Xibalba—charmèd land,
Dig deep and hide thy lustrous head !

'Neath thickening mould, and drifting sand,
And dark old forests make thy bed
In silence : Yet be not so dead,
But sleep ! sleep—clinging to thy past.
And though the slow-paced ages make
Long marches o'er thee, holding fast
Thy buried fame, thou need'st not wake !
E'en though the eager Present cry
"Awake !" sleep on ! Old Time hath sealed
Thy quietude. They do not die
Whom God entombs ! the mystery
Of silent life, lies unrevealed.

Feasts, sacred festivals, and games ⁶¹
Attest the general joy ; red flames
The altar fire : the hearth-stone glows
O'er warriors stretched in soft repose
Well earned : all hearts are jubilant
Save one, whom neither victor's chant,
Nor spoils can charm—the noble chief !
His heart is heavy with a grief
That crowds out joy. The victors brought
Proud trophies back—not whom they sought—
Zululu !

O how small becomes
A triumph, the encomiums
That live on mortal breath, the power
That grapples for one little hour
With fate when all the lights are out,
And gropes the hungry heart about
Unsatisfied !

What cares he now
That men before his greatness bow—
That he is Oxac? Hides away
The wretched chieftain, and the day
Wears on with noisesome glee and din ;
All tiresome sounds rush rudely in
And torture him with cruel pain
Till madness seizes on his brain !
He calls his child, and beats the air,
And weeps, and shivers in despair.

In vain his awed attendants try
Full many a royal remedy,
Rare gums and cordials, herbs and roots—
All medicative mountain fruits
Renowned for potency to heal
Afflicted life. The priests appeal
To temple gods.

Distressed and prone,
Their faces in the dust, bemoan
The people their belovèd chief ;
They smite their loyal breasts for grief,
And weeping wander to and fro.

“Why wail the people? What swift woe
Doth chase the tears down warrior cheeks?”

A captive slave it is, who speaks—
A poor Xibalban, won in war,
A self-forgetful questioner.

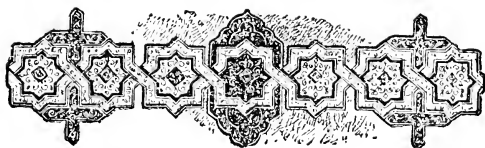
“Oxac, our mighty chief must die,”
Replies the guard with downcast eye ;
“A fever boils his blood, his brain
Is fired with fury—hope is vain !”

“O say not thus ! there is a weed
In virtue great as is the need
Of stricken Oxac. In my land
'T is native, and with careful hand
Oft gathered—e'en in yonder dell
Perchance it grows ! I know it well—
O bid me seek it !”

“Go !” out-spoke
The guard, and quick his fetters broke ;
“Go, haste thee ! bring the gracious weed !
Life, death, according to thy deed
Thy recompense.”

Bowed low the slave
And sped away. Ye gods, vouchsafe
Him guidance ! on a trembling breath
Hangs his eternity ! life, death !





CANTO X.

THE FEVER WEED.

WHAT long and patient search he makes
By sedgy pools with border brakes
In still recesses sleeping late
Beyond the morning, nooks ornate
With leafy spray, the hiding-place
Of stranger blooms that in his face
Do stare—sweet creatures bright and bold !
He heeds them not, they do not hold
His destiny.

How anxiously
He treads his way ! no cliff so high
He cannot climb, no dell so deep
He may not dare, though serpents creep
Among the dark vines poisonous—
Perchance they guard his treasure thus—
Ah, see ! the tiny plant he spies !
Success out-flashes from his eyes,
And crushing 'neath his heel defeat,
He plucks it—'t is a meek-eyed cheat !
By fields where late the zea maize stood,
Up hill aslant, through tangled wood,

So true, and purposeful, and strong,
No path seems difficult or long.

On, on, till strength and hope decline,
And day has reached the boundary line
Of twilight, and the fever weed
Unfound ! Perhaps beyond its need
Great Oxac now—then what remains ?
With cruel mockery and chains
The sterner fate to failure fixed—
A bitter portion all unmixed
With pity.

For a moment stood
The wavering slave, wide was the wood—
Might he not flee ? why should he die—
And life so dear ? In agony
He prostrate fell.

“ O thou,” he cried,
“ To whom this place is sacred, hide,
Or smite me with thine awful rod,
Nor prove thyself a vengeful god
In whom a stranger cannot trust.”

“ Quizquo is merciful and just.”

Amazed, he sprang upon his feet
And listened ! How tempestuous beat
His heart—he heard it—nothing more !
He peered about him ; all things bore
A dumb behavior, and he felt
The night draw round him like a belt,

Chill, tightening, holding fast his breath !
Had Oxac's spirit freed by death,
Disrobed to walk the trackless air,
Vindictive come to mock his prayer ?
A sudden horror seized his soul !
His eyes instinctive sought the ghoul
Where shadows walked among the trees
Down shaken by the evening breeze ;
Peered cautiously from side to side,
But nought of spectral shape he spied.

Then suddenly his soul grew strong—
Remembering that no taint of wrong
Imbued it, that no evil thought
Concerning Oxac, was inwrought
With service well, but vainly done,
Though dark the doom his zeal had won.
Again upon the leaf-strewn sod
He bowed and prayed :
“ Great mountain God

If aught thy pity may command,
Know thou, a captive in strange land,
In dire extremity doth plead
Thine aid to find the fever weed
For stricken Oxac—lest he die !—
O speed his foot, and guide his eye,
Thou great unknown—his only trust—”

“ Our only trust ! Quizquo is just ! ”—
As if an echo did repeat
Its pretty measure,

To his feet
Again he sprang, his prayer forgot,
Dispatched his senses to the spot
Whence seemed the sound, a symphony
Of word and tone so faint, so nigh !
“ Ye gods, forgive a mortal ear ! ”
He whispered, bending low to hear.

“ Quizquo is good ; yon pretty star
That through this rifted roof I see,
His love hath summoned from afar,
To watch and shine for me,
For long the night may be.

“ Quizquo is great and good, beside
What need a simple maiden know ?
Contented in his care I bide
Until he bids me go—
Himself the way will show.

“ Quizquo is merciful ; he draws
His curtain closer, lest the light
Should blind mine eyes ; because
Of my imperfect sight
He gives me rest and night.

“ Quizquo is good, and great, and just ;
Enough—what would Zululu more ?
Here will she tarry in sweet trust
Until the night is o’er,
And love shall ope the door.”

The plaintive measure seemed to die
In waves of sweetness, like the sigh
Of evening zephyr to the rose
The while he rocks her to repose.

His fate forgotten, terror flown,
No longer helpless and alone,
For, came to him that soulful power
Which sometimes crowns, in darkest hour.
Inspired with purpose seemed the slave ;
A moment's earnest heed he gave,
Then carefully explored the ground
Whence late exhaled that dream of sound,
That melody so strangely sweet—
He sought, and at his very feet
A narrow fissure found, which led,
Out-stretching like a sombre thread,
Far up the hill-side. Tremblingly
He kneeled and spake :
 "Whate'er thou be—
Earth-born or spirit—answer me."

"A mortal answers : could she know
Thou wert a friend, and not a foe ?"

"A foe to none am I. Beguiled
By Oxac's need into this wild—"

"His need ! Oh, what is Oxac's need ?
I am Zululu—Oxac's child !
Say on—my hungry ears have greed."

“ All day the gods have whispered ‘ speed
Thou vexèd spirit—speed away ! ’
Disease hath touched him with decay,
The fever on him feeds.”

“ Nay, nay !
He must not die ! ” Zululu cried,
“ Some remedy may yet be tried—”

“ For which my life is pledged ; alas
I cannot find it ! ” Leaves and grass
Back brushing as he spoke, down peered
The captive ; all was dark and weird.

“ Zululu, why in this strange spot ?
Forth—haste to Oxac ! tarry not !
Perhaps thy ministry may save
His precious life ! ” implored the slave.

“ Then must he die. This cavern door
Hath Quizquo shut ! Oh, never more,
Perchance, shall poor Zululu see
Her father’s face ! ”

“ It shall not be !
What though these granite doors are strong,
The soul is stronger ! Powers malign
Must yield !—My life, sweet maid, for thine ! ”

“ Yet stay ; I hide away from one
I dare not wed—King Kayi’s son.
Methinks ’t were better here to bide—”

“ List ! Kaska ne’er will claim his bride.”

He clasped the lovely hand that through
The crevice reached to him.

“ Adieu,

Zululu ! ” but no answering word ;
A sigh that told of tears he heard,
A piteous sigh that sped his flight ;
He dashed away into the night
Down, down the mountain’s rugged height,
A pathless, treacherous way, but what
Can hinder one who has forgot
Fear, fate, himself ? or what control
That strange delirium of the soul
Broke loose from human impotence ?
Poor cumbrous shape, and strictured sense,
Plod on, your way is rough and new—
The soul waits not to walk with you !

The lowland gained, his course he steered
By evening star, until appeared
The temple luminous, the pride
Of Anahuac, the stranger’s guide
To Iztapac. Anon he neared
The mighty walls by patience reared,
By courage guarded ; but alas !
Within the city gates could pass
Unchallenged none.

Uncertain clung

The answer to his stammering tongue ;
The rough guard marked it, and not less
His unaccustomed air and dress.
Suspicion said “ A foe thou art ! ”

And swift and straight the hurtling dart
 Was sped and buried in his breast ;
 He fell—no cry his pain expressed,
 Yet low he murmured :

“ Thus to die
 With sealèd lips ; ye gods deny
 Life, liberty to me, all bliss,
 Whate’er ye will, but grant me this,
 A heaven for her, a swift release
 To fair Zululu ! courage ! peace
 Poor heart ! perchance some kindly ear
 May catch thy cry.”

’T was heard, drew near
 The guards and gave gruff audience.

“ For Oxac’s sake—O bear me thence
 Within the city ! Staunch this flow !
 A little breath—the chief shall know
 Where hides his child—ah me—too—late ! ”

Strong hands push back the ponderous gate
 And bear his bleeding form within,
 And crowding round him seek to win
 His spirit back. With fibrous twines
 Tie up his wounds, nutritious wines
 Bestow, and gentle food.

Attent
 They wait the slow arbitrament
 Of life with death, till as from sleep
 He rouses.

“ Do the people weep ?

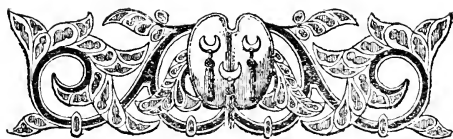
Oxac—lives he ? I pray you say
He lives !”

“ He lives.”

“ Then haste away—
O *haste* and bring his child—’t is she—
Her very lips did answer me
From darksome cave in yonder wild,
‘ I am Zululu, Oxac’s child ! ’—
Can nought your sluggish natures stir ?
Ye cowards ! Will none rescue her ?
Then I—stand back—nay, let me go !”

He sought to rise,—as if a blow
Had smitten him, he swooned, and fell
Into a long dim interval
Of silence, and he would not wake,
Nor heed their questions, nor unmake
The wonderment his broken speech
Had wrought, but held beyond their reach,
A key which might unlock the day
To Oxac, who benighted lay
In heavy slumbers, moaning low
Of lost Zululu—for his woe
Slept not, and his attendants deemed
His grief but greater when he dreamed.





CANTO XI.

THE SEARCH.

LONG hours unconscious lay the slave ;
Save that he breathed no sign he gave
Of life, but looked as one long dead.
He heeded not the guard who said :

“ Base treachery is here ! this slave
But sought his worthless life to save
By falsehood ; gave his word to bring
A fever-weed, some useless thing
His people prize, the which should cure
Our stricken chief ! the forfeiture
Was death—which he accepted. See !
He brings no royal remedy,
But comes with mutterings false and wild
Of forest, cavern, Oxac’s child !
Perchance he prates of Quizquo’s cave
To lure us thither—cursèd knave !
Gods ! I would smite him, but to save
His life for sorer punishment.”

Some answered “ So ” ; and some low bent
And looking in his face nought said :

Some stood apart and shook the head,
While some strode wrathfully around,
And others gazed upon the ground.

At length a youthful brave stepped forth ;
The cold, dread courage of the north
Was his, and hot young blood.

“ A slave

Has called us cowards ! and we save
Our answer till his emptied veins
Refill, that he may reap the gains
Of treachery. Why doom him thus ?
Those whom the gods count valorous
Are just ; and justice bids us heed
His broken story, and with speed
Yon forest search, and with such care
The maiden shall be found—if there.
Though idle words were those that fell
From craven lips, yet do we well,
O brother braves ? To her retreat
The gods direct our willing feet ! ”
The words of Atzol.

Answered none

By yea, or nay, but one by one,
A deedful few their places took
Beside the youth.

The babbling brook
Sings not its source through summer's drought.
Mute force is mighty, working out,
The grand designs of nature. Power
Is deed, when duty strikes the hour.

They formed, a hardy zealous band ;
Each warrior held a flaming brand,
And each his ready weapon bore,
And all were silent.

Round and o'er
The night was thick, and hushed, and late,
But every heart was desperate
With purpose, and each black eye burned
With energy which dared or spurned
The hinderments of circumstance.
What eager ear ! what sidelong glance !

Stout natures sometimes reap disgrace
From trifles ; very pigmies chase
The man in armor who o'erthrows
In awful needs gigantic foes !

A nameless terror chilled each brave
As wound their way toward Quizquo's cave,
For footprints from the dingle deep
Led on and up the wooded steep
To thickest shade.

Now, near the ground
Their torches flare and circle round
The astonished trees, to which the light
Long hours before had said " Good-night."
A broken twig, a new bent blade,
A leaf's displacement in the shade,
A low crushed lichen quivering yet,
Because some foot had late been set
Upon it, said " This way he went."

They understood, pressed on, content
With roughest toil could they but trace
His wanderings to the hiding-place
Of lost Zululu.

 All confessed
As leader in the doubtful quest
Young Atzol, whose harangue had won
Their dumb approval ; counselled none
This course or that, but as he led
They followed.

 With observant tread
He sometimes moved, and sometimes stood
Erect and questioned close the wood
With sense acute, or in his might
Advanced, far flashing left and right
His fiery brand.

 “Ha ! What strange thing
Here flutters like a red-bird’s wing
Among these brambles fell and bold ?”
He said, and plucked it from the hold
Of thorny fingers. ’T was a shred
Of some gay-colored stuff. A thread
Of fringe clung to it, and betrayed
The part.

 “Methink’s Zululu’s maid
Had mantle bordered thus !” one cried.
Another viewed it and replied :
“Of Bacca’s mantle ’t is a part !”

Thereat spake Atzol : “Be each heart
By this assured ; about this place

Be every nook and dream of space
Severely searched." All gave assent
And forth by paths divergent went.

Like those who listen, awed and prone
To catch the earthquake's undertone,
So Atzol bowed him to the ground,
With ear expectant set. Profound
The silence, till at length up-crept
A quavering breath. He started; swept
The drifted leaves with blaze of light.
When, lo! discovered to his sight
A fissure, sinuous and dark!
With curious eye he stooped to mark
Its meaning, when a sobbing sound
Arose as from the rifted ground.

"Whom holds this dungeon?" loud he cried,

"Zululu," one low-voiced replied,
"And good old Bacca;—other seems
The tone—not that which all my dreams
And prayers have thrilled since yester eve—
Would 't were the same!"

That she did weave
Strange words into her answer, what
To those who understood them not,
Whose earnest souls were only stirred
For her release?

Prompt was the word,
And brave the deed, as stroke on stroke

Their huge stone hammers beat and broke
Through walls of earth and granite gray,
The cavern opening to the day—
To those entombed the world without.
When gentle feet stepped forth, a shout
Proclaimed through all the dark profound,
“Zululu ! Oxac’s child, is found !”

Bright streamed the autumn sunshine down ;
Late morning lay upon the town,
Ere Atzol’s gallant equipage
Swept through the gates—its final stage
With triumph rounded. Warriors strong
Wrought glad delirium in the throng
By acclamation long and wild
In honor of their chieftain’s child.
All nature seemed to catch the thrill
Of joyance, vale and vocal hill
Awoke and echoed long applause ;
The birds sang new sweet tunes, because
Of fair Zululu—homeward borne !
And when with sweet face sorrow worn,
Down from the birchen chair she stepped,
Full many a gray-haired matron wept
For very joy that she was found,
While happy children strewed the ground
With flowers.

Poor child ! she could not heed
Or cheers, or tears, or loving deed
Of artless childhood. Swift she flew
To Oxac’s chamber—but he knew

Her not, nor answered when she spake,
Beseeching him with tears to wake.

Long time beside his couch she stands,
His burning brow with tender hands
Soft soothing ; but while yet she waits
And weeps and prays, the fever bates,
And Oxac wakens ; lo ! 't is she—
Zululu—mute with misery
And love's solicitude !

Her eyes
To all his doubts give glad replies—
Enough ! He clasps her to his breast
And holds her close, then fearful lest
His senses cheat him, bids her speak ;
He strokes her hair, and feels her cheek,
Her soft hand presses, calls her name
O'er and again, while hint of blame
Intones his accent, as if still
Her presence answers not his will.

At length o'erwrought he sleeps, to wake
Refreshed. To other hearts that ache,
Bring sweet repose, O blessed sleep !
And gently close the eyes that weep.





CANTO XII.

THE TRIAL.

SO Oxac of his malady
Was healed, and on an early day
He rose and thanked the gods, and bore
To temple altars princely store
Of sacrificial fruits, and there
Devoutly worshipped.

High in air,
Soft overlapping fold on fold,
Thick clouds of odorate incense rolled
Like prayers of white-robed souls that fling
Sweet benedictions from the wing
Spread heavenward, marking as they rise
The spirit's highway to the skies.

As if to some great festival
The people gathered, proving well
Their loyalty and gratitude—
Was not great Oxac's life renewed,
Zululu found ?

No woe to check
Her happiness had Iztapec,

And all the land had joy again ;
Staid matrons, lion-hearted men,
Youths, maidens, children,—all were glad.
In garb fantastic some were clad,
Invoking mirth by dance and game ;
While ever and anon the name
Of Oxac woke the loyal cheer
So grateful to a ruler's ear.
And ever and anon, uprose
A shout which over vanquished foes
Inherited to old Nahuan braves.
Far heights responsive flung the waves
Of tumult back, and with the shout
The name of Kaska, wreathed about
With scorn ; till when, Zululu nought
Had known of deadliest battle fought—
And Kaska slain ! But there she stood,
A fair strong type of maidenhood
How tempest shaken !

To the chief

She trembling clung. Somewhat of grief
To pity softened made her weep—
Resolving Kaska's name to keep,
Enshrined by memory with pure
And sacred things, from scorn secure.
E'en as she wept, to Oxac pressed
A warrior with the foul request :

“ Great chief, this proud occasion cries
Aloud for fitting sacrifice.
Unnumbered southern slaves await

Long servitude or swifter fate
On smoking altars. One by one,
Dost bid us offer to the Sun
Their proud warm hearts ? ”

“ O never yet

Our sacred altars have been wet
With human blood,” Oxac replied.
“ Enough that fair Xibalba’s pride
Is humbled for a crime not hers !
Enough, her sons are servitors
To strangers.”

Bowing low his head,
“ Oxac hath spoken,” Murzi ⁶² said,
As if his spirit were subdued,
Yet still in abject attitude
Remained till Oxac bade him speak.

“ Most gracious chief. I do but seek
The just enforcement of just laws
For crimes committed. This my cause ;
Among the captives there is one
Who dared—what never can be done—
To blind old Murzi ! Treachery
Demands sore punishment ; with me
He broke his faith. For Oxac’s need
He pledged to bring a fever weed,
Some sure specific known to bate
The fever fire, but, lingering late,
Brought only fabrications wild,
And tangled stories of thy child—
Full tender pratings for a *slave* ! ”

“Then shall he die ! but bring the knave.
Unjudged shall pass no weakling’s cause,
If guilty, stern and just our laws.”

Soon came old Murzi ; petty power,
Which crowns the craven for an hour
Of tyranny, had stamped the sign
Of cruelty on every line
And feature of his swarthy face ;
A human fiend, without one grace
Of human sympathy was he ;
A hateful, blackened mystery
Of life which should be white ! So sin
Consuming all the good within,
Disfigures all without.

Fell back

The clamorous crowd—a narrow track
The guards held open to the court
Toward which the hapless slave, the sport
And curse of all, was rudely pressed.
Whom thus the angry chief addressed.

“Ha ! art thou he whose word is nought,
Who pledged to bring, but never brought,
The fever weed ? Who dared to teach
Thy captive tongue to frame in speech
My daughter’s name—full tenderly ?
Accursèd slave ! speak ! Art thou he ?”

With wrath was Oxac’s eye aflame,
The slave drew up his well-built frame

To fullest stature, from the ground
His clear eyes raised. His arms were bound,
His feet were bare, a ghastly wound
Was in his breast, his garment rent
And stained with blood. On him were bent
Unnumbered hateful eyes, which fed
Upon his anguish.

Battle bred,
His savage heart to pity steeled,
Or in the court, or on the field
Nahuan power was terrible !

“ Great chief, thou bidd’st me answer. Nay,
I am not he ! doth Murzi say
One broke his faith ? I am not he.
A captive’s tongue touched wantonly
Thy daughter’s name ? I am not he !—
My soul stands forth defiantly
To meet the charge ! Yet wherefore tell
My story ? Murzi knows full well
He wrongs me, and the gods know all ! ”

A low, mad murmuring filled the hall,
Which spread, and quickening louder swelled.
A frown from Oxac promptly quelled
The outbreak.

“ Take this captive hence
To deepest dungeon, recompense
Awaits him ! ”

At the word, ’t was done ;
The glad day waned, low flamed the sun

And passed away with fair adieu.
The people from their mirth withdrew
To humble homes and rugged rest ;
Within the palace proud forms pressed
Voluptuous couches. Thick and wide
Night's ebon curtain fell.

Untried
No soul is strong—no life all white
Unwashed by dews of sorrow's night.
No love, whate'er its boast, is true,
That cannot walk the furnace through—
Some seven-fold trial without loss.
The purest faith wreathes fair the cross,
And holds it dearer than the crown.
The bliss unblighted by earth's frown
Is born of sacrifice.





CANTO XIII.

SOME CAUSES WILL BE HEARD AGAIN.

DAMP, lone
The dungeon, where on bed of stone
The captive crouched ; yet by and by
He slept and dreamed. An azure sky
Was o'er him, there were flowers and trees,
And murmurings of summer seas,
And spicy breezes, and bright birds
Whose songs were miracles—sweet words
Which through his charmèd senses stole
Into the chambers of the soul,
And thrilled him with such strange delight
He wakened—lo, his room was bright !
A lovely form was o'er him bent
And one was whispering.

“ Punishment
For deed like thine—O brave true heart !
For though I know not whence thou art
Nor whom, yet thou didst save me, thou ! ”
She laid her soft hand on his brow
And gazed into his eyes—her own
Were full of tears, her gentle tone

Was tremulous, her unbound hair
Lay on his breast.

“ O vision fair !
O blessed eyes that on me beam !
O matchless, sweet, bewildering dream—
How dost thou mock me ! ”

“ Nay, not so ;
No dream is this to mock thy woe—
Only Zululu, whose distress
Companions all thy wretchedness.”

“ Zululu—and she pities *me* ? ”

“ Would hand of mine might set thee free !
Yet much I fear thy hapless fate ;
My father knows not to abate
His ire, and Murzi maddened him.
Too well I read it in his dim
But angry eyes. Alas when wrong
Confuses judgment, and the strong
To cravens yield ! Of what avail
Is mercy's plea, or sorrow's wail,
In such an hour ? Oh, then, how weak
Is woman, though her heart doth speak !
Power hath a voice for heavy ears,
That drowns the eloquence of tears.
And yet the gods judge not as men—
Some causes will be heard again,
And rulings of these lower courts
Be set aside. Heaven's law comports

With truth, while at the bar above,
The mightiest advocate is love.”
The captive smiled. “Thy loving thought
Hath surely for my spirit wrought
Release ; in solitude or death,
My wasted cheek will feel thy breath,
Thy tender words will charm my ear,
The radiance of thy beauty clear
My clouded sky ! I cannot know
Henceforth the quality of woe.
Whate’er my fate, remembering thee
Zululu, ’t will be heaven to me ! ”

“Perhaps to-morrow thou must die !—
If so, I know in yonder sky
Thou crowned shalt be.”

“There free from blame
Might I but breathe Zululu’s name—”

“How would she list and make reply ? ”

“Gods ’t were a blissful thing to die ! ”

“Thy *life*—for this shall be my prayer.”

She softly stroked his raven hair,
And o’er his wounded bosom spread
His tattered robe ; then plucked a thread
From out its border ; next her heart
She hid it, as some magic art
It held ; the while the poor slave lay
So wafted from his woe away

His tongue forgot all forms of speech.
He seemed to stand on some bright beach
Where sails are set for paradise !
A moment's bliss—but gone ! his eyes
Flashed sudden pain.

“ Nay, to despair
O leave me, dearest ! thou dost dare
Great peril, coming thus alone
To this vile place ! ”

“ Aye, if 't is known
Alone thou diest not ! but well
Is bribed the kind old sentinel,
My foot is heedful, heavily
The city sleeps ; fear not—for me
The gods will care.

The hour grows late—
Yet know, brave heart, though thou should'st die
Death never bars the morning gate
To holiest love ; and by and by
'T will ope for me. But now adieu.”
A signal—back the huge door drew
And closed again, and she was gone.

A long thick night, a slow gray dawn,
Then came the day ; with rosy hand
She scattered sunshine o'er the land,
And sipped her dew with smiles so bright,
The beverage sparkled into light.

Refreshment feigning from repose,
Zululu with the morning rose

And donned her court apparel flecked
With brilliancies, her round arms decked
With bands impearled, her pretty feet
Dressed daintily, adorned with sweet
Autumnal blooms her tressy hair,
And o'er her shoulders flung a rare
Embroidered mantle seldom worn,
By regal elegance forsworn
Familiar uses.

“ Bacca, nay !

Know only this, that I to-day,
By all the arts love can devise,
Would be most pleasing in his eyes—
And yet, I may not please him ! so,
My girdle tie—now let me go,
Lest soon my trembling limbs refuse
To bear me hence. No childish dews
Must blind mine eyes—my tongue must speak
Articulate—upon my cheek
Must flash no feeling ! I must still
This fluttering heart—I can—I will !

“ Great peril ? I would undertake
All peril—all things for thy sake
Brave heart ! poor slave !—ah ! said I—what ?
I pray you, Bacca, heed it not,
My soul is vexed with troublous things,
And idle thoughts take ready wings.”





CANTO XIV.

A PLEA FOR LIFE.

OXAC was early in the court,
And there she sought him. To comport
With reverent customs she must bide
His leisure.

At the chieftain's side
A dozen veteran warriors stood,
And one seemed speaking ; audience good
Gave Oxac, for he did not hear
Zululu's footstep ; half in fear
She softly stole into the shade
A massive pillar cast, and laid
A hush on clamorous distress.
She could not hope to gain access
To Oxac's side without delay,
Nor unobserved, to steal away.
" Alas 't is Murzi—all is lost ! "
She murmured, as a dark form crossed
The outer court ; his grave advance
She marked with pallid countenance,
But sought to hush her heart—to hear
Or hopeful word, or doom austere,

For one in thrall ! Though Oxac spake
The words her heart would glad or break
No meaning bore they to her ear.

“ O gods,” she breathed, “ by this dear sign
Lead on.”

And from its bosomed shrine
She drew, and to her pale lips pressed
The crimson relic. On her breast
Low drooped her head like one in prayer
When hope is challenged by despair.
Thus shadowed by the column old,
Herself as motionless and cold,
She stood some anguished minutes ; when
Her absent soul came back again,
How silent was the council hall !
Murzi was gone, the chieftain, all—
But whither ?

With a startled cry
Like children when the lamps go out
And all is night in earth and sky—
With none to kiss away the doubt,
To hold the hand, and banish fear,
With “ child, eternal Love is here ”—
Zululu, frenzied with affright,
Upstarted ! peering left and right—
Along the corridor she flew,
Here, there, upon the courtier’s view
Like sudden sunshine bursting through
A hurrying cloud of summer time,
Her footfalls waking sweetest chime,

Until the chieftain she espied ;
He saw, and called her to his side ;
Her presence was a glad surprise,
She read it in his love-lit eyes.
She smiled, and to her pretty cheek
The dimples came ; in silence meek
She stood till Oxac first should speak,
Their custom such, and then with words
As musical as woodland birds
She filled his ears, repeating oft
Endearing phrase in accent soft.
Brief pauses, artless pleasantries
And happy answers, framed to please,
Instarred some moments of delay.
At length, but with her eyes away,
As if her heart were other where,
Though all her soul was full of prayer :

“ My father—priceless boon I crave ”—

“ Say on, my child.”

“ His life ! the slave ”—

“ The slave ! what *slave* indeed can claim
Zululu’s care ? well may hot shame
Burn thus thy cheek ! what slave ? reply !
For by my word the wretch shall die.”

“ Alas ! I only know ’t is he
Whom cruel Murzi wrongs, the same
Whom Quizquo sent to succor me :
O nought of treachery or blame

Doth stain his soul ! 't is he whose feet
Drew near the door of my retreat,
Else had I perished. If his fate
Be unpronounced—if not too late—
O Father—say he shall not die ! ”

“ Too late.”

She caught the stern reply
And fell as if his clenched hand
Had struck her down. His cold command
Thrice given she heeded not, though heard—
“ Zululu, rise ! ”

Tone, look, and word,
The triple shaft sent not amiss,
Had struck with strange paralysis
Her warm young life.

Transfixed, amazed,
Old Oxac on his daughter gazed.
Cold, tearless, motionless ; all hushed
Her passion plea ! a blossom crushed
By icy hand were not more dead
To warmth and light, its sweet soul fled—
And yet not dead was she ; for long
The heart will throb, the pulse beat strong
When all that makes life glad and warm
Is frozen in some awful storm.

Till now, her every thought and sense
Had yielded prompt obedience,
Nor ever deemed his dictate ill,
Nor dared the deadline of his will.

“ Too late ! ’

She lies with breast unstirred
By hope or fear, while Oxac’s word
On dumb rebellion falls and dies
Unnoticed. Anger, scorn, surprise,
Compassion, love his great soul seize
And swift through all their fixed degrees
Lead down to tenderness.

“ My child !
What evil influence hath beguiled
Thy peace and wrought this hour of ill ?
Speak, daughter ! why so cold and still ?
Zululu ! ”

But her eye is set
On nothingness, a dead regret
That wakes no sigh.

“ Alas, some spell
Demonic and terrible
Hath won her ! ”

Filled with strange alarms
The father lifted in his arms
His stricken child and fled with haste
Forth, toward the temple. Eager-faced
The people followed.

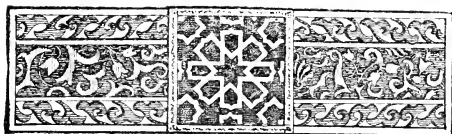
“ Or in grief
Or wrath goes forth our mighty chief ? ”
They questioned, though all tongues were mute.
Proud forms in homage absolute
Were bowed, he heeded none, nor aught,
Until his ear confusion caught,
Made dreadful with the shout of doom,

As soldiers, from his dungeon gloom
Led forth the captive slave to die.

Upon the savage pageantry
The victim gazed. From some far height
His eye had caught a steadfast light,
His breast the calm of courage born ;
His proud lips wore a noble scorn
Of deeds ignoble. Threat and thrall,
The enginery of torture, all—
He scorned them, aye and death ; so strong
Becomes the soul inured to wrong
And fired by love, that from its track
Pain flees, and life itself stands back.

Much marvelling that he trembled not,
They led him to the fatal spot,
A broad low mound of ashen earth
Where not a blade of green had birth,
And bound him to a beam of oak,—
A ponderous beam by flame and smoke
Oft charred and blackened, it bespoke
The lengthened torture to be wrought !





CANTO XV.

FULFILMENT.

ERE yet the lighted brand was brought
A silence signal, Murzi gave,
And stepping forth addressed the slave

“Seek not, O guilty wretch, to die
As die the brave, nor dare defy
The god of justice ; ere too late,
Confess thy crimes commensurate
With stern award.”

The captive turned—
His breath came quick, his clear eye burned
With passion's fire.

“Contemptuous knave !
Thy words become thee, noble brave !
The gods thy virtues mark !—confess ?
Aye, if to soothe Oxac's distress,
My service wearisome and long
Though fruitless—be a grievous wrong ;
And if it be a crime more base
To find, unsought, the hiding-place
Of lost Zululu—”

“ List ! that tone !

In Quizquo’s cavern dark and lone
It spoke me life—it is the same !
Methinks one called Zululu’s name,”
The maiden murmured, but the slave
Heard not her words.

“ Yet know, old brave,

Zululu loves me ! by and by,
My fetters broken, I shall fly
Beyond the shadows, and await
Her coming at the morning gate—
Mine own Zululu ! ”

“ Aye, ’t is he !

Dear heart—Zululu dies with thee ! ”
She cried, and sprang from Oxac’s hold
Like some bright spirit uncontrolled,
And instant to the captive flew,
Her jewelled arms around him threw,
Her soft cheek to his bosom pressed ;

“ Thus, Murzi, is my love confessed !
My strength and purpose here are shown—
For know, he shall not die alone ! ”

In faces stern, and scarred, and old,
Her young eyes flashed defiance bold.
The guard astonished, quailed as those
Who smite in dreams immortal foes,
From whom their puny blows rebound
Without an echo.

O'er and 'round,
A miracle of silence fell—
A moment awful with the spell
Of indecision.

Then was heard
An unimpassioned, low-voiced word
From Oxac—and one sped and brought
A gorgeous mantle richly wrought,
And laid it in the chieftain's hand,
Who with a gesture of command
Approached and spake :

“ Since to defy
The royal edict, is to die—
Accept thy doom, O hapless child !
This wretch ignoble, and defiled
By crime—if thou with him wilt die—
Shall wear a robe of royalty,
This glittering robe-befitting thine,
Lost daughter of a noble line !
Then—thou hast said it—by his side,
Zululu, shall thy love be tried ! ”

At Oxac's word, away they tore
His garment, shred, and stained with gore,
All heedless of the quivering flesh,
And ghastly wound from which afresh
By rough hands prompted, trickled down
Bright drops upon his bosom brown—
When lo ! a gorget⁶³ one espied
And plucked it. Oxac, eager-eyed,
Observed it carefully, and then

With searching eyes the slave—again
The coin examined ! O'er and o'er
Close scanned the curious seal it bore—
The legend sought to read in vain,
So dizzy grew old Oxac's brain !
Then to the slave :

“Speak ! by whose hand
Was this bestowed ?”

“At thy command
I answer, else my lips were sealed,
My name and lineage unrevealed.
My father, good King Kayi, placed
That sign upon my breast ; disgraced,
Condemned, yet am I Kayi's son,
Oribó.”

“Gods ! what day ill-starred
Is this ? What dreadful deeds are done
To be repented !”

Oxac cried ;
And thrusting back the quaking guard
Sprang quickly to the victim's side—
Caught cruel Murzi's gleaming blade
And smote his fetters, and unmade
The captive.

'T was a gracious deed
To fling the nuptial robe decreed
For Kaska, o'er the astonished youth.
“Ingemmed with innocence and truth,
And priceless love—'t is thine, O son
Of Kayi ! and this treasure won
From Oxac—thine—with all her charms !”

He said, and to Oribo's arms
Released for rapturous embrace,
The maiden turned, her soulful face
Aglow with love—how pure, divine,
Oribo understood ; no word
Save but “ Zululu ! ” “ Ever thine ! ”
The happy listening angels heard.

Thence Oxac to the palace led
The blissful pair, his good gray head
Uplifted into sunshine, where,
So clear the light, so pure the air,
No cloud his soul and sky between,
He felt the hand of Love unseen
Upon his brow, that bent to hear
Soft echoes which his outer ear
Had never caught. With wondering eyes
Again those dark old prophecies
He read—dream, sybil, bird—all held—
Though strangely, slowly syllabled
By years, a gracious meaning ; bright
It burst upon his raptured sight.
Bliss, brooded by a sombre wing !
Within the captive was the king !

And when anon, with proud acclaim,
Refreshed and rich apparelled came
Oribo from the royal bath,
The sun-god's smile illumed the path
Which brought him to the nuptial feast
To claim his bride. There sacred priest

With unctuous rite and solemn lore,
Sealed him the chieftain's son ! Aye more,
His blessing, heritage of power
Gave Oxac as his daughter's dower.

Some seasons more, a peaceful few,
And Oxac quietly withdrew
Into his summer house of rest,
From whence his mighty soul uprose,
Recalled to regions of the blessed,
Beyond the bound of earthly woes,
To share the chariot of the sun—
The grand award his life had won.

The oracle was verified.
As slave, Oribo won his bride—
As king he led her to a throne
His queen, where long her beauty shone
Resplendent, and her gentle name
To peerless virtues linked, became
The honored theme of olden song.
Good King Oribo well and long
Ruled Anahuac. But soft, speak low !

Loud praise is not for those who rest
From work well done ! Enough to know
In stillest chamber sleep is best !
And theirs—ah, well, so long ago
The gods received them, nought can break
Their slumber till His word "Awake"
Bespeaks the morning.

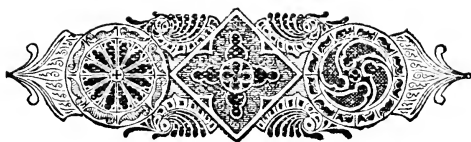
What to them

The sceptre and the diadem,
The rise and fall of empires ? what
The countless loves of countless years
Since they through sorrows, hopes, and fears
Made blissful harbor ?

What avails
To watch the waves, or count the sails,
Or list the surging of the sea
That beats eternal shores ?

Each bark
Shall drift into a quiet lee,
And calmly anchor in the dark.

Although in some brief hour, and bright,
A distant sail we dimly sight
And speak it—and it gives no heed—
What matter ? anchorage is sure !
And though we strain our eyes to read
The thought of time-dimmed tabature,
Or ancient record, or would trace
The footprints of a vanished race
Where shadows lie which will not lift,
We know through deepest mould and drift,
Time holdeth these, and more, in trust,
Much all immortal lives in dust.



NOTES.

1 Ä-nä-wak', meaning "near the water."

2 Anahuac is an extensive plateau situated in the centre of Mexico, at an average height of 7,000 feet above the level of the sea—raised by volcanic force between the two oceans.—*Lippincott's Pronouncing Gazetteer of the World.*

3 Ox'-äc.

4 The Mexicans punished with severity all the crimes which are particularly repugnant to nature, or prejudicial to the state.

5 Wherever nature, in the perpetual struggle of matter to restore an equilibrium, assumes *power* there they (primitive peoples) are sure to locate a god.

6 Popocatepetl, pronounced Pó-pó-kä-ta-petl', meaning "smoking mountain."

7 The peaceful and semi-civilized Toltec-man was once the proud master of our continent, which he busily dotted with forts and mounds, with mighty monuments and great cities.—*Schoolcraft's Aboriginal Races.*

8 Iztapēc, pronounced Ēz'-tä-päk.

9 Pictography was employed not only to beautify the inner walls of temples and palaces, but also to record historical events and religious rites.

10 Zululu, pronounced Zoo-loo-loo.

11 In old paintings a female figure is represented with hair flowing in long tresses and adorned with jewels. The Toltecas were fond of wearing dresses of showy colors, and excelled in the fabrications of cloth and hangings.—*Kingsborough*.

12 Cholula, pronounced Cho-loo'-lä.

13 Nahuas, pronounced Na-hoo'-äs.

14 Quetzalcoatlé, "Feathered Serpent." Date of his first appearance a little before the middle of the 1st century.

15 Quetzalcoatlé, pronounced Ket-zäl-cow-attle.

16 Hue-Hue-Tlaplan, pronounced Hoo-ä' Hoo-ä' Tläp'-län.

17 Tamoanchan, pronounced Täm-o-än-shän'.

18 Tulla pronounced Yool'-yä.

19 Kayi, pronounced Kä'-ye.

20 Xibalba, pronounced He-bäl-bä.

21 Zinco, pronounced Zeen'-co.

22 The Mexicans taught their children, together with the arts, religion, modesty, honesty, sobriety, labor, love of truth and respect to superiors.

23 Bacca, pronounced Bäck-cä.

24 Kaska, pronounced Kaz-ka.

25 Votan, pronounced Vo'-tän, founder of the Maya culture. One of the great works of this hero was the excavation of a tunnel, "Snake-hole," from Zuqui to Tzequil.

26 Usumasintas, pronounced Oo-soo-mä-seen-täs.

27 Nachan, pronounced Nä-shän, city of serpents.

28 Maya, pronounced Mä-yä.

29 Kayi, pronounced Kä'-ye.

30 Chan, pronounced Shän, serpent.

31 Katun, pronounced Kä-toon, cycle of fifty-two years.

The Katun year consisted of twenty-eight weeks of thirteen days each, and *one additional day*.

32 Tetan, pronounced Ya-tän'.

33 Oribo pronounced O-ree-bo.

34 The rabbit was considered as a type of innocence.

35 The murder of Chaac Mal, a powerful sovereign of Chicken-Itza, by his brother Aac, is still told in stone. The funeral chamber, the mural paintings, the statues, and the monument of the murdered king, are found by the explorer. In the funeral chamber the terrible altercation between Aac and Chaac Mal is represented by large figures three fourths life-size.—*Dr. Le Plongeon*.

36 A tablet from the ruins at Palenque represents a beautiful youth arrayed in an elaborate military dress and plumed crest of magnificent character. He wears what appears to be a cuirass about his shoulders and chest.

37 Among the ruins at Palenqua are those of a palace 228 feet by 182, and about 30 feet in height. In the outer wall are forty doorways. The double cornices are highly artistic. This palace had double corridors. It is presumed that nearly all of the piers separating the doorways in the eastern wall of the palace were ornamented with stucco bas-reliefs. On the wall of its inner apartment is said to have been the most beautiful specimen of stucco relief in America. M. Waldec declares it worthy to be compared to the most beautiful work of the Augustan age.

38 They had in every city or village a public place or square appropriated for the traffic of everything which could supply the necessities and pleasures of life. Even merchandise had its particular place.

39 The ancient Mexicans had a superstition that in the last night of the fifty-second year of their cycle the sun would destroy the world.—*John Short*.

Their ancestors had from time immemorial admonished them that such years as succeeded each other after every interval of fifty-two years would be dangerous, unlucky, calamitous, on account of the universal deluge having taken place in such a year, and likewise darkness caused by an eclipse of the sun, and earthquakes everywhere.—*Kingsborough*.

40 Great attention was paid to the flight of birds. The carnivora, or battle-birds, were thought to be prescient of the times and places of conflict, and their gathering to fatten upon the dead on the battle-field was regarded with forebodings.

41 Quizquo, pronounced Queez'-ko.

42 The ancient Mexicans paid a superstitious reverence to the summits of high mountains which were perpetually covered with mists and dark clouds, believing them to be the abodes of their mountain gods.

43 The pointed mace or head-breaker was a most formidable weapon.

44 The great struggle was often at the gates in a desperate hand-to-hand encounter.

45 Tobacco was smoked by the ancient tribes. Their pipes, elaborately carved, differed from those of to-day chiefly by having no stems.

46 The men were very expert in the cutting and setting of precious stones.

47 Manabaho, pronounced Män-ä-bäz-ho', excelled in his superhuman and god-like feats. He killed the mammoth serpent and bear-king.

48 Papukewis, pronounced Păp-oo-kwees, could turn pirouettes until he raised a whirlwind.

49 Kwasind pronounced Kwă-seend, could twist off the strongest rope. These things were related to stimulate the physical powers of the young.

50 They were accustomed to decorate the inner walls of their temples with vermilion-red ochre. Flowers, fruits, heroes, gods, always the Feathered Serpent, were painted or sculptured on the walls.

51 Hurling stones was done with great skill and precision.

52 Murzi, pronounced Moor'-zee.

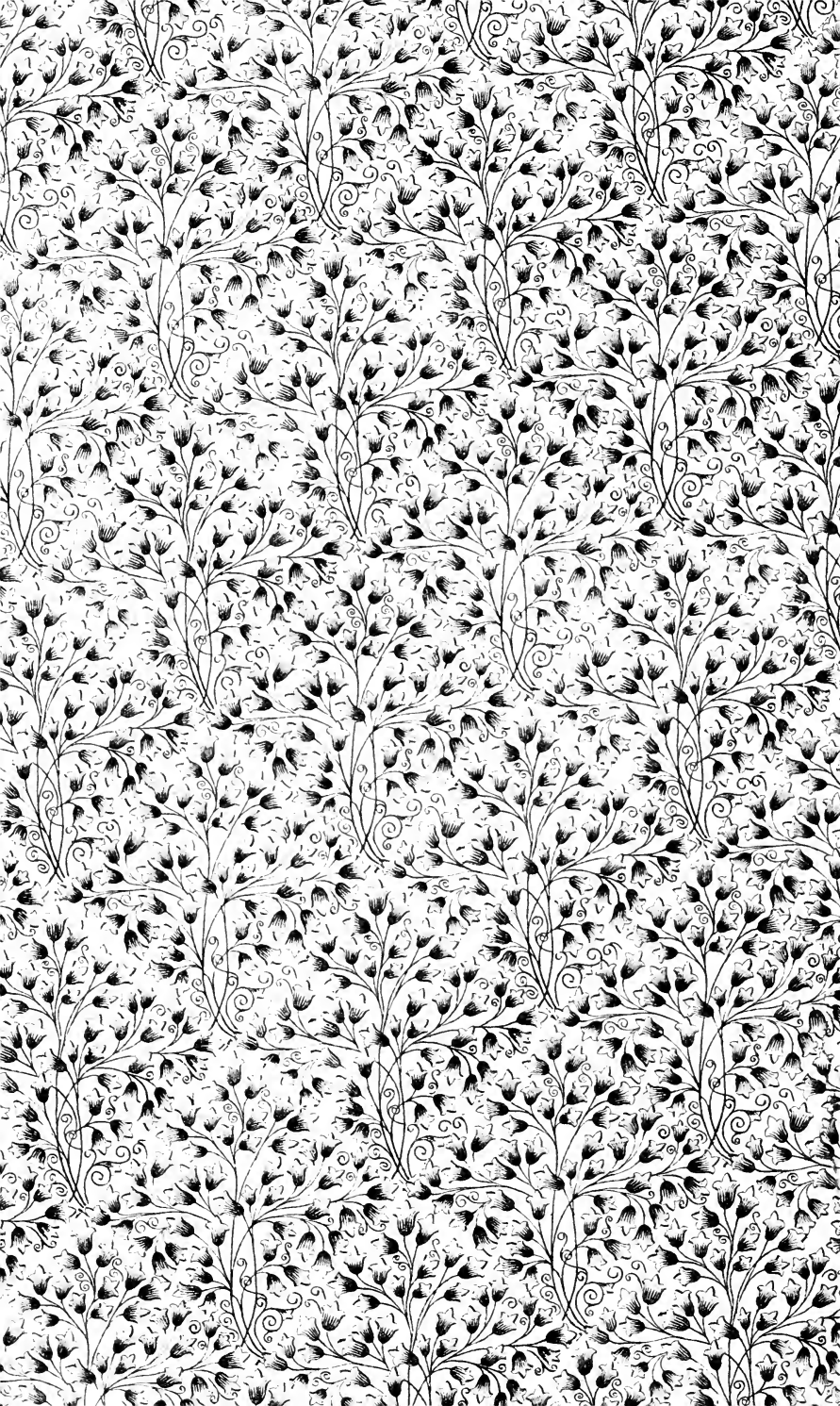
53 The ancient gorget or medal, bestowed as a mark of distinction, was highly prized by the possessor.

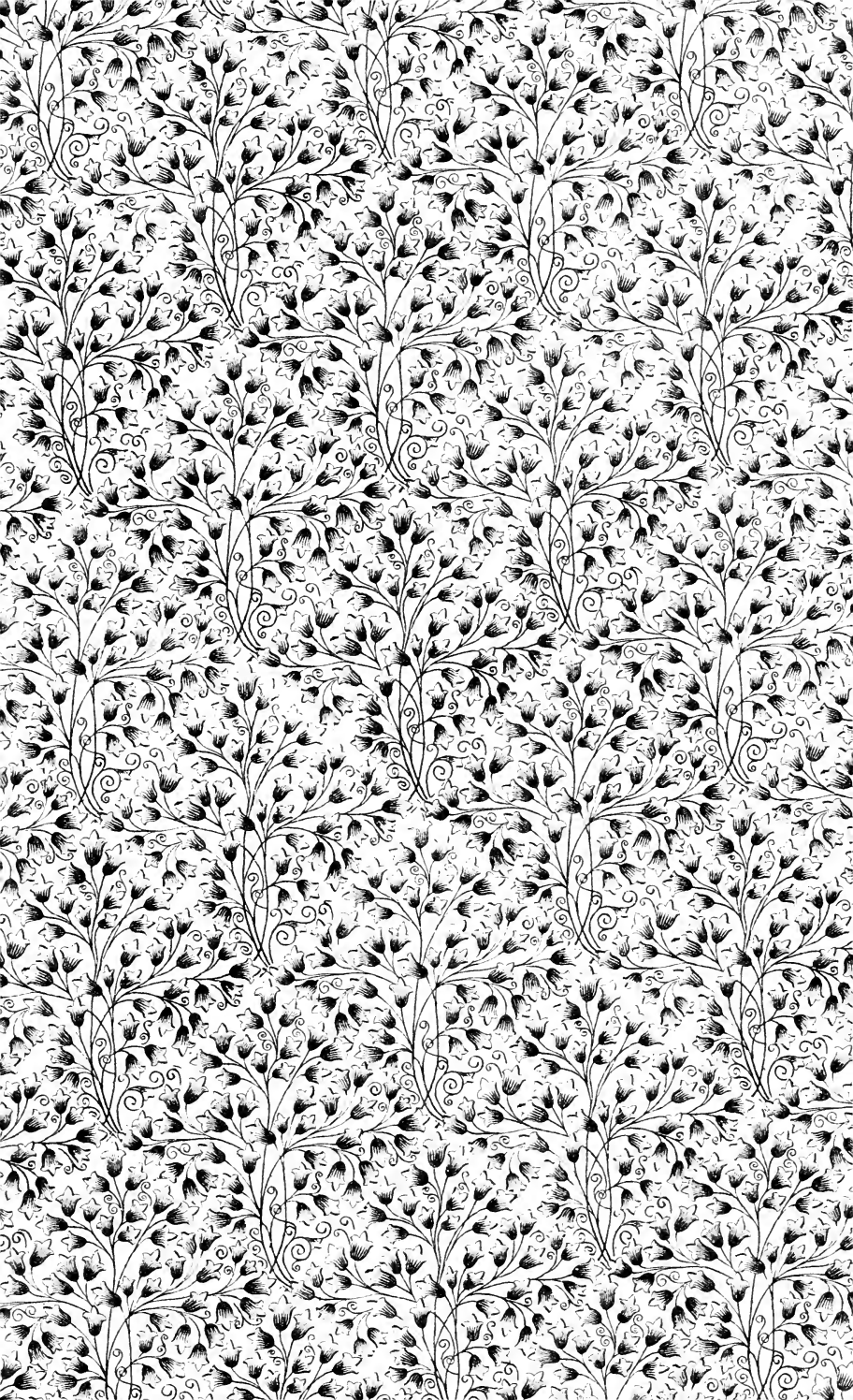
THE END.











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